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Tuesday, 16 October 2018, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Llorentty Soliz	(Bolivia (Plurinational State of))
Members:	China	Mr. Ma Zhaoxu
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Ipo
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Edjo Memba
	Ethiopia	Mr. Amde
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Tumysh
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Netherlands	Mrs. Gregoire Van Haaren
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Russian Federation	Mr. Polyanskiy
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce
	United States of America	Mr. Cohen

Agenda

Maintenance of international peace and security

Root causes of conflict — the role of natural resources

Letter dated 9 October 2018 from the Permanent Representative of the Plurinational State of Bolivia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (S/2018/901)

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The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Maintenance of international peace and security

Root causes of conflict — the role of natural resources

Letter dated 9 October 2018 from the Permanent Representative of the Plurinational State of Bolivia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (S/2018/901)

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2018/901, which contains a letter dated 9 October 2018 from the Permanent Representative of the Plurinational State of Bolivia addressed to the Secretary-General, transmitting a concept paper on the item under consideration.

I wish to warmly welcome the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. António Guterres, and to give him the floor.

The Secretary-General: I thank the Bolivian presidency for convening this debate.

The exploitation of natural resources, or competition over them, can and does lead to violent conflict. Preventing, managing and resolving such conflicts is one of the major and growing challenges of our time. United Nations studies show that more than 40 per cent of internal armed conflicts over the past 60 years have been linked to natural resources. With the increasing impacts of climate change evident in all regions, the risks are only going to grow.

Other global trends, such as a growing population, increasing consumption and environmental degradation, are also placing significant and potentially unsustainable pressures on the availability of many natural resources. These include oil, gas, minerals, water and land. The unfair distribution of natural resources, and corruption and mismanagement, can and do lead to conflict, especially in countries with weaker institutions. These pressures can also exacerbate existing ethnic or religious divides within societies and across borders.

Since 1990, 75 per cent of civil wars in Africa have been partially funded by revenues from natural resources. The illegal extraction of minerals, timber, charcoal and wildlife has fuelled violence in a number of regions. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, it has generated almost a billion dollars in revenue for rebels and criminal groups. Likewise, in the Central African Republic the illicit exploitation of minerals by numerous armed groups and militias has contributed to sustaining and prolonging the conflict.

More needs to be done to regulate the provenance, sale and trade of minerals through cooperative arrangements involving civil society, Governments and regional and international organizations. A positive example is the Kimberley Process, which succeeded in reducing the trade in conflict diamonds. Through certified extraction, production and fair trade practices, and with a focus on aiding local communities, lawlessness can be countered and tangible benefits brought to conflict-affected populations.

It is also worth emphasizing that shared natural resources have traditionally also been a catalyst for cooperation among States, communities and people. Mutual benefits generally act as an incentive for sustained peaceful dialogue, which in turn can generate cooperation and understanding in other areas. For example, benefit-sharing on water resources has a long history among the riparian States of the Senegal River basin. In South America, Lake Titicaca, the largest freshwater lake on the continent, has long been a source of cooperation between Bolivia and Peru. And, from my own experience, the Albufeira Convention, agreed during my time as Prime Minister of Portugal, continues to promote good relations and cooperation on water management between Portugal and Spain.

In Central Asia, progress is being achieved in the area of transboundary water management through ongoing consultations among Central Asian States, supported by the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy. In Iraq, the United Nations Assistance Mission is working to reinforce peace and stability through the development of a land-disputes project to promote confidence-building among communities and increase inclusivity. In the Lake Chad basin, cooperation on water has also played a critical role in bringing countries together to address the broader challenges to the region.

In short, the United Nations recognizes the potential for the shared management of natural resources as a means for preventing conflict and enhancing regional cooperation for peace and sustainable development. To that end, we have taken note of Member States' call for a greater focus on these issues, including recently through the adoption of Security Council resolutions on Lake Chad, Somalia and Darfur, as well as a presidential statement on West Africa and the Sahel (S/PRST/2018/16). In response, we are taking a number of actions.

First, the Organization is seeking to strengthen our capacity to address the growing threat of climate-related security risks. This includes a new joint initiative involving the Department of Political Affairs, the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Environment Programme.

Secondly, we intend to maximize opportunities to use mediation over natural resources as a tool for conflict prevention, in cooperation with Member States, regional partners and international financial institutions. For example, the High-level Panel on Water, which I convened together with the President of the World Bank Group, has helped galvanize action around hydro-diplomacy.

Thirdly, we will further strengthen our partnership with regional and subregional organizations to work on ways to increase attention to building the capacities of national and local actors to prevent and respond to conflicts with natural resource dimensions. As part of the Joint United Nations-African Union Framework for an Enhanced Partnership in Peace and Security, I welcome the ongoing collaboration between our respective organizations to support the Panel of the Wise in its efforts to improve the prevention, mediation and resolution of conflicts over natural resources in Africa.

Fourthly, we are seeking to strengthen the capacity of women's networks and organizations to effectively engage in dialogue and mediation processes around natural resources and the environment, including in the context of climate change. That initiative — co-led by the UN-Women, the United Nations Environment Programme, the United Nations Development Programme and the Peacebuilding Support Office — has already supported indigenous and Afro-Colombian women in Colombia in processes related to natural-resource use, ownership, governance and benefit-sharing.

Fifthly, we also recognize that issues relating to land remain a critical factor. Following an initial scoping study in 2016 conducted by UN-Habitat, I have recently finalized a guidance note to ensure greater strategic convergence across the United Nations system to help address issues of land and conflict.

Once again, let me thank the Bolivian presidency for today's timely debate. There is a lot of work to be done on this critical issue, and if we address it effectively, we will go a long way towards creating a safe and sustainable world for everyone, now and in future.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank the Secretary-General for his interesting and extensive briefing.

I shall now make a statement in my capacity as representative of the Plurinational State of Bolivia.

My delegation thanks the Secretary-General for his briefing today, and we take this opportunity once again to reiterate our support for his important work.

The twentieth century is characterized by the strengthening of multilateralism as a fundamental component of relations among States and respect for the basic norms of international law, built on the basis of treaties that establish rights and duties that we mutually accept within the framework of the exercise of our sovereignty, with the objective, among other things, of protecting the most vulnerable from encroachment, misappropriation and depredation by the most powerful. The current conflicts arising in different parts of the world show us that behind many international or local geopolitical disputes is also almost always an interest in access to and the control and exploitation of economically attractive natural resources, which is reflected in the fact that according to the Secretary-General's report published by the United Nations Environment Programme, over the past 60 years at least 40 per cent of conflicts have been motivated by this reason. In many cases, when control, exploitation or access to oil, gas, water, minerals or other natural resources becomes a strategic objective of the parties to the conflict or of armed groups and criminal organizations, it is because behind them there are often also multinational corporations or foreign interests willing to use them to gain access to these resources.

Some examples very close to the concerns of the Security Council, just to mention a few from throughout the history of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, are the coup d'état against Iran in 1953, undertaken against a democratically elected Government that, in the exercise of its sovereignty, had nationalized oil from the hands of an Anglo-American company; the invasion of Kuwait in 1990 by Iraq, whose intention was to control 20 per cent of world oil production; the conflict in Libya, where parties are constantly clashing over control of the country's hydrocarbon industry and which is also affecting the entire Sahel region; the illegal invasion of Iraq in 2003, whose objective was, in the end, to control oil production and the oil market; and the involvement of various armed groups in the Democratic Republic of Congo as a result of the illegal trade in tin, tantalum, tungsten and gold.

In other cases, when sovereign policies of the States over their natural resources affect the interests of corporations or of some other countries that form part of the chain of industrialization or commercialization of the resources, these corporations have no qualms about financing separatist movements, arming opposition groups or provoking policies of change of regime to establish Governments in line with their interests. The history of the twentieth century in many countries in my own region is a clear example of this.

We believe that it is not enough to monitor and punish armed groups, their heads as individuals, or the parties to the conflict; it is also necessary to make sanctions regime more dynamic and effective. To do this, we must apply sanctions to the networks that make up the entire chain of those involved in the conflict. In the case of conflicts related to natural resources, sanctions should also be applied to what we may term commercial enablers, which in large part are composed of large transnational companies that enable the commercialization of natural resources that have been obtained illegally or in conflict situations as well as for their insertion into global markets. Sanctions should also apply to what we may term financial facilitators, composed of financial corporations and tax havens, which allow for the insertion and legitimatization of profits derived from the commercialization of these resources into the global financial system. Accordingly, the Security Council must reformulate the mandates of the subsidiary bodies dealing with sanctions, so that the panels of experts have a mandate to investigate and identify these corporations, affecting or definitively shutting down these criminal networks. With the results of these investigations, the Council should be able to impose sanctions on such networks.

It is important to fight not only the illegal exploitation and misappropriation of natural resources, but also the unequal distribution of the benefits resulting from their commercialization, which can make them catalysts that exacerbate conflicts. The Bolivian State has faced these scenarios throughout its history. A clear example of this goes back to the nineteenth century, when the exploitation of natural resources by foreign corporate interests drove an asymmetrical and expansionist war in the region that deeply affected my country. These foreign interests were replicated during much of the twentieth century and translated into the privatization and exploitation of our natural wealth — water, silver, tin, oil and gas — for the benefit of transnational corporations, leaving only tiny royalties for the development and well-being of our people.

I would simply like to try to show what has been done in Bolivia with respect to this issue. In 2006, the State decided to nationalize the country's natural resources, which were recognized through the Constitution adopted in 2009 as the direct, indivisible and irrevocable property and dominion of the Bolivian people, under the administration of the State in accordance with the collective interest. This mandate allowed the recovery of the natural resources of strategic companies from the hands of the companies that had exploited them to the detriment of the interests of our people.

An example of how sovereign control of our resources changed the course and development of Bolivia can be seen in the social and economic changes that my country has been experiencing for the past 12 years. It is no lie to say that before that time, my country's presidents would go to the International Monetary Fund or the Paris Club almost as beggars to ask for economic assistance just to be able to pay the salaries of our teachers or doctors. Twelve years ago, the dynamics of the distribution of profits for hydrocarbon exploitation sent 82 per cent of them to transnational companies and only 18 per cent to the benefit of the country. Since our resources were nationalized, 82 percent now remains in the hands of the Bolivian people and 18 per cent goes to the service contracts of the transnational companies that remain in the country because they still make healthy profits.

Hydrocarbon revenues in Bolivia increased from $2.9 billion for the period between 1994 and 2005 to $35.2 billion for the period between 2006 and 2017. Bolivia's gross domestic product also grew steadily. In 2017, it was 4.82 per cent, well above the regional average of 1.87 per cent, and our gross domestic product rose from $9 billion in 2005 to $36 billion in 2017. Our international reserves increased from $1.7 billion to $10 billion between 2005 and 2018.

In the past 12 years, this new flow of income and its redistribution has enabled us to reduce extreme poverty from 37 per cent in 2005 to 17 per cent today, and to shrink inequality. In 2005, the richest 10 per cent owned 128 times more than the poorest 10 per cent, whereas in 2017, and today, that figure has been reduced to only 47 times more. Public investment increased from $620 million in 2005 to $5.5 billion in 2017. Some 3 million people in a country of 11 million joined the middle class, which grew from 35 per cent of the population in 2005 to 58 per cent in 2017. The infant mortality rate dropped by more than half between 2008 and 2017. The number of medical and health facilities doubled. Life expectancy increased from 63 years in 2005 to 72 years in 2018. The school dropout rate fell from 4.5 per cent in 2005 to 2 per cent in 2017. I understand that this subject is not one that is inextricably linked to peace and security-related issues, but the sovereign control of natural resources enables fairer and more human societies to be built.

In conclusion, and using the words of President Evo Morales when he spoke at the General Assembly in 2015 (see A/70/PV.15), we believe that the Council must reflect in the future on the following before taking decisions based on various contexts. President Morales said that we are living in times of peace, not times of invasion or domination. We must therefore ask ourselves, who benefits from wars? After interventions, who retains control over natural resources? Who governs — our citizens, or foreign interests that promote wars for their own benefit? Those questions can help to a certain extent as we begin today's debate.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

I give the floor to members of the Council who wish to make statements.

Mr. Ipo (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): As I begin my statement, which I am making on behalf of the three African countries that are non-permanent members of the Security Council — Côte d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea and Ethiopia — I would like to thank the Bolivian presidency for convening today's briefing on the role of natural resources in armed conflicts. On their behalf, I would also like to express our sincere gratitude to Secretary-General António Guterres for his briefing and relevant analysis of the correlation between natural resources and the conflicts that impact the African continent with particular virulence.

Although the importance of natural resources for economic growth and development in Africa is well-known, their control is a considerable challenge for countries that appear to be vulnerable or affected by instability and armed conflict. Over the past decades, regrettably the African continent has been a theatre for many armed conflicts, which have resulted in unprecedented mass atrocities and humanitarian crises. Originally begun for sociopolitical reasons, several crises in Africa have subsequently morphed into armed clashes for the control and exploitation of vast territories rich in natural resources, such as gold, diamonds, oil and timber. Because such resources also fuel the majority of the conflicts on our continent, they clearly have an adverse impact on peace, stability and economic and social development. Indeed, the lack of governance and an inequitable distribution of natural-resource dividends are key factors in the outbreak, funding and continuation of armed conflicts. The issue of access, control and distribution of natural resources therefore appears to be a major underlying cause of the conflicts that persist in Africa.

The current challenges in finding a peaceful solution to crises in the Central African Republic and Libya, as well as to those that resulted in bloodshed in Liberia and Sierra Leone, clearly demonstrate the unavoidable nature of armed conflicts that are fuelled by the pillaging of natural resources by armed groups. In its concern about conflict prevention and resolution in Africa, the African Union (AU) has placed its focus squarely on the issue of the link between conflicts and natural resources, which has been at the centre of many Peace and Security Council meetings focused on the close correlation between violent conflicts and the illegal exploitation of natural resources in Africa and the ways and means to address it.

The responses to the challenges raised by natural resources in conflict prevention and resolution must be based on strategies that enable better management of access to natural resources, and on the strengthening

of national and international control mechanisms in order to prevent them from being used as a means of financing conflicts. Discussions within the Peace and Security Council have therefore highlighted the need to put in place effective national strategies for the management of natural resources, in order to ensure that income is used not to fuel conflicts but rather to benefit local communities. In that way, they become an important asset for the sustainable economic and social development of our States rather than a factor of instability.

Furthermore, while it is undeniable that many conflicts in Africa are fuelled by poor governance and trafficking in natural resources, it is also important to highlight and strongly denounce the involvement of actors from outside the continent who benefit from the exploitation and illegal trade of resources. Those actors at the margins of armed conflicts jeopardizing the development of our continent, as is rightly pointed out by the Bolivian presidency in today's concept paper (S/2018/901, annex), are generally armed groups or multinational companies, international financial networks or foreign interests whose actions promote the outbreak of violent conflicts and ongoing instability in regions rich in natural resources.

We believe that it is the Council's responsibility to take appropriate measures, in accordance with the principles and objectives of the Charter of the United Nations, to ensure the preservation of the sovereignty of States in the management of their natural resources. In our opinion, every State must have the sovereign right to control and use its natural resources in accordance with the principles of international law and good governance. The Security Council must also strengthen its role in combating the illegal exploitation and trafficking of natural resources in areas where they contribute to the outbreak and continuation of armed conflicts.

Today's meeting also gives us the opportunity to highlight another major challenge facing our continent — illicit financial flows related to the illegal exploitation of and trade in natural resources. Such illicit flows, due to their scale, have a negative impact on the continent's ongoing development and governance programmes. According to some estimates, they could reach $50 billion per year, about twice the amount of official development assistance to Africa. In reality, such estimates cannot help but reflect a larger phenomenon, given the lack of accurate data on all illicit transactions on the African continent. It is therefore imperative to ensure the effective and transparent management and equitable distribution of natural resources in order to safeguard the interests of the country concerned and the well-being of its people. Equity, transparency and accountability in the management of natural resources are therefore essential to conflict prevention and the promotion of sustainable development in Africa.

We recognize and welcome the efforts of the international community to improve the international legal framework for the use of and trade in natural resources. They have resulted in the establishment of relevant standards through instruments such as the Kimberley Process and the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative. For its part, the African Union adopted the African Mining Vision in February 2009, which calls on the AU Commission to integrate the peace and security dimension of natural resources into conflict-prevention and early-warning mechanisms, conflict management and peacebuilding policies and programmes. It is also important to highlight the work of the African Union High-Level Panel, chaired by Mr. Thabo Mbeki, former President of South Africa, whose report contained useful recommendations on addressing the complex issue of illicit capital flows from Africa.

Despite the efforts being made, the expected results will be effective only if there is close cooperation with external actors, including multinationals involved in the exploitation of natural resources. We believe that ensuring greater control of supply and marketing chains and accountability for individuals, groups or multinationals involved in the illegal trade in natural resources is also essential. In addition, it is more important than ever that international partners, transnational corporations, the private sector, civil-society organizations and all stakeholders support the promotion of transparency, equity and development-oriented natural resource governance. That is key to conflict prevention and resolution on the continent.

Our Council has used various tools to address the links between natural resources and conflict, including natural-resources sanctions, ranging from a diamond and timber embargo to a ban on charcoal exports and maritime measures prohibiting illegal oil exports. The report produced by Security Council Report is an excellent research tool that provides a useful analysis of the conception and implementation of these sanctions regimes. It is urgent that we take stock of the lessons learned from the implementation of these measures in

order to strengthen the Council's role in the prevention and resolution of conflicts linked to natural resources.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We welcome the convening of this meeting and Bolivia's initiative to raise the critical issue of natural resources and their link to the root causes of conflict, as well as the important briefing given by Secretary-General António Guterres.

As a country that is rich in natural resources, Peru appreciates the fact that they play a crucial role in its growth and development. However, we are also aware that the exploitation of these resources and access to their respective markets have historically been decisive factors in the outbreak of conflicts in various parts of the world. The potential of these resources to either generate prosperity or have an undesirable impact leads us to reiterate the importance of being able to rely on inclusive and accountable institutions, as well as the rule of law, in order to prevent conflicts by addressing their root causes and promoting sustainable development in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This also requires a rules-based order that guarantees the predictability of international trade and the stability of financial markets in order to avoid the boom-and-bust cycles to which countries that export primary materials are particularly vulnerable and that often degenerate into conflict situations.

It is clear that such matters go beyond the Council's remit. Nevertheless, we believe it important for this organ to acknowledge and demonstrate its relevance in the maintenance of international peace and security so that these issues can be addressed from a preventive, multidimensional approach that focuses on the root causes, as predicated by the concept of sustainable peace.

For example, in assessing the impacts that mining industries may generate, it is important to maintain an inclusive dialogue among the State, the private sector and the communities potentially affected by such projects. We also consider it important that mining industries contribute to local development by creating and strengthening capacities, transferring technology, offering decent employment opportunities for the population living in the areas in which they operate, increasing the local content of the goods and services produced, and ensuring economic inclusion while respecting traditional ways of life.

All these aspects, which are linked to the sustainable management of natural resources, are critical to effectively combating poverty and human vulnerability, and to preventing perceptions of corruption and injustice that are then exploited by interested actors to radicalize disgruntled sectors of the population. In many contemporary conflicts, we have seen how such perceptions have facilitated the development of militias, which exercise illegal control over natural resources. This often leads to situations of anarchy in which serious violations of human rights and major deterioration of the environment are usually observed.

We must especially bear in mind that such dynamics are facilitated and even encouraged by the links that illegal extractors of natural resources often establish with criminal organizations in order to access international markets, launder illicitly acquired wealth and obtain weapons. In the light of such vicious circles, we believe that the sanctions committees of the Council should pay special attention to illicit trafficking networks dealing in natural resources emanating from countries affected by conflict and the corresponding illegal flows. This is in line with the presidential statement S/PRST/2007/22 of June 2007.

We also believe that the missions deployed under Security Council mandates to countries rich in natural resources can help the respective national authorities to prevent and combat the illegal exploitation of their resources. In the same vein, we believe that in countries in transition to post-conflict situations, the Peacebuilding Commission and United Nations country teams should be able to support national authorities in strengthening the institutions required to manage their resources sustainably. These measures are relevant in countries such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which was recently visited by the Council and is especially rich in natural resources that, far from promoting development, have led since colonial times to cycles of violence and conflict that must come to an end.

Mr. Cohen (United States of America): I thank you, Sir, for calling this meeting on today's important topic. We would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his briefing and participation in today's meeting.

The link between natural resources and conflict is complex, and the United States shares the concern that in many instances, as noted by the Secretary-General, the poor management of natural resources by Governments can contribute to corruption, conflict and violence. It is unfortunate that today's Council

briefing has been deliberately framed to ignore internal State mismanagement of natural resources. Despite the potential for natural resource endowments to bring prosperity and social development when properly managed, we unfortunately see far too many examples of countries where natural resource wealth does not translate into improved livelihoods for citizens.

Nowhere are the dangers — indeed, threats to peace and security — posed by the mismanagement of natural resources more apparent than in Venezuela, where millions of citizens of that once wealthy country have been driven into poverty by the rapacious corruption of a kleptocratic regime. Instead of serving as a source of wealth to improve the livelihoods of Venezuela's citizens, the State-owned oil company Petróleos de Venezuela, S.A. exists today primarily as a vehicle for embezzlement and looting by Maduro and his inner circle. This has created a situation of scarcity and economic instability that has generated massive refugee migration flows. With its oil sector in decline, Maduro's regime has turned to another valuable resource to plunder, Venezuela's gold deposits.

In Venezuela's mining regions, illegal and unregulated mining is now resulting in rapid deforestation and pollution, without regard for the environment or the indigenous populations. We have no doubt that the proceeds from this illicit mining are lining the pockets primarily of Maduro and those closest to him. The effects of the crisis in Venezuela extend far beyond its national borders and the resulting humanitarian crisis has placed the burden on the entire region.

Similarly, in Iran we see the country's rich endowment of natural resources siphoned away from activities that could benefit the Iranian people and used both to enrich Iran's elite and to fund Iran's destabilizing activities abroad. Iran has used the proceeds of its oil and gas trade to build missiles capable of delivering weapons of mass destruction, increase internal repression, finance terrorism and fund destabilizing activities in Lebanon, Syria, Yemen and Iraq. For these reasons, we are working with countries that import Iranian crude oil to cut their purchases substantially, and we are pleased that so many countries and companies are moving to stop such imports.

In South Sudan, the Government has been collateralizing future oil sales to secure foreign loans in violation of the Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan, signed in 2015, and the revitalized peace agreement signed last month. The money has been used not to feed the people but rather, again, to enrich elites and extend the conflict, including attacks on innocent civilians.

In the cases of Venezuela, Iran and South Sudan, the destabilizing effects of natural resources are not the result of the activity of external armed groups, multinational companies or foreign interests; rather, they are the direct result of decisions taken by the leaders of those countries to engage in corruption and/or use the proceeds from their natural resource wealth to fund destabilizing activities that threaten international peace and security.

There are steps we can take as a Council to improve our chances of ensuring that natural resource wealth translates into greater prosperity. For example, the United States supports the Kimberley Process as a constructive international initiative that fosters transparency in the diamond trade and has contributed to a marked reduction in — in fact, almost the complete elimination of — the trade of conflict diamonds since its establishment. We support meaningful reform of the Kimberley Process to ensure its long-term health and relevance. Specifically, at this year's plenary session we will seek an expanded definition of a conflict diamond to include diamonds linked to conflict or violence, regardless of the perpetrator.

Finally, United Nations sanctions regimes remain a critical tool for addressing the destabilizing impact of the trade in illicit resources. As members of the international community, States must do more to strengthen the implementation of United Nations sanctions regimes that seek to eliminate trade in natural resources that contribute to conflict. If we work together to cut off those flows and support cooperative efforts to improve the oversight of natural resources, together we can help prevent natural resource-related issues from contributing to conflict.

Mrs. Gregoire Van Haaren (Netherlands): The Kingdom of the Netherlands would like to express its sincere thanks to Secretary-General Guterres for his briefing. We thank the Bolivian presidency for convening this briefing on a critical topic, which the Security Council has discussed only once since 2013 (see S/PV.6982).

Over the decades, we have seen that the control and exploitation of and access to natural resources have

contributed to fuelling armed conflict. There are many steps that the Council and the United Nations can take to tackle the issue and to promote the use of natural resources for sustainable peace. Allow me to focus on the role of natural resources in three phases of the conflict cycle: in preventing conflicts through adequate risk assessment; during a conflict through transparency and accountability; and in building sustainable peace.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands consistently calls for adequate risk assessments and analyses of all root causes and threat multipliers. That is as relevant for natural resources as it is for climate change and water stress. Activists and affected communities in the Democratic Republic of the Congo have called attention to the links between that country's mineral wealth and its protracted armed conflicts. It is important that such calls find their way to the Security Council and the Peacebuilding Commission and that our future actions be based on adequate risk assessments and analyses. We commend the Secretary-General for his efforts in that area and look forward to hearing more from the Secretariat during the Arria Formula meeting on water, peace and security to be held later this month. We must ensure that conflict-, gender- and climate-sensitive mandates take the availability, extraction and governance of natural resources into account.

With regard to my second point, concerning accountability and transparency, natural resources are a broad concept, and it would be a mistake to solely focus on extractive industries. There are several lessons learned with regard to accountability and transparency. Like the Secretary-General, I would like to mention the Kimberley Process. The multi-stakeholder approach of the Kimberly Process was successful in reducing the trade in blood diamonds. It facilitates cooperation among Governments, the private sector, producers of rough diamonds, traders, watchdogs and non-governmental organizations.

The Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Supply Chains of Minerals from Conflict-Affected and High-Risk Areas of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights form a basis for collaborating with the private sector to ensure that human rights violations and bribery, for example, are adequately addressed in conflict and high-risk areas. We expect all companies to undertake due diligence to contribute to responsible sourcing and production. The illegal exploitation of and trade in natural resources remain root causes of violence in ongoing conflicts such as in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Central African Republic, South Sudan, Somalia and Libya. In line with that, there is also an imperative role for Governments to play. Governments must choose to dismantle war economies and economies of predation in which the trade of natural resources is used to finance the interests of a few rather than the interests of many. The gains of ending the conflict and dismantling networks should be seen as more important than utilizing the networks of ivory traffickers, gold and diamond smugglers and mineral dealers to earn a profit. We must change the cost-benefit equation. In that context, what can the Council do? It can act with regard to dismantling those networks. Tools such as adequate reporting and political pressure must be utilized.

The illegal trade in natural resources should be grounds for sanctions, as revenues from illegal exploitation and trade are used to destabilize countries. Political will, however, is absolutely necessary to do that. The Council must also continue to evaluate and build on experiences from peacekeeping operations, such as the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic, both of which play roles in combating the illegal exploitation of resources.

Natural resources are key to building sustainable peace. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the sustaining peace agenda underline the importance of adopting an integrated approach and of creating more inclusive societies. Governments need to take responsibility, be equipped to combat the illicit trade in and trafficking of natural resources and be able to manage their related industries. If Governments do not shoulder their responsibility, the Council has a responsibility to act. We know that the development of the responsible sourcing of and trading in natural resources contributes to creating decent jobs and, ultimately, to social and economic growth.

In conclusion, when looking at the role of natural resources in conflicts, it is imperative to do so throughout the conflict cycle. We call on the Council to call for appropriate risk assessments and analyses; to urge Member States to work with all the relevant stakeholders to address the issue; to take up the responsibility to act when required in combating the

threat; and to make use of the tools at its disposal to continue to build sustainable peace.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I thank you, Mr. President, for having convened this meeting. I also thank Secretary-General António Guterres for his participation and valuable briefing. We very much hope that today's discussion will raise our awareness of the link between natural resources and conflict. The concept note (S/2018/901, annex) sheds light on the close link between them, which the Security Council has discussed on two previous occasions (see S/PV.5705 and S/PV.6982). Nevertheless, we have seldom met to discuss that issue and to reach the necessary understanding and solutions, which shows that the Council does not see how dangerous it is and the threat that it poses to those experiencing its impact.

Conflicts caused by disputes over natural resources are no longer only among sovereign States, as was the case before and during the Cold War. Over the past three decades, we have witnessed many civil wars, primarily in developing countries. Such conflicts seem to be political in nature but the root causes are economic and social. The consequences have been catastrophic, and the Security Council has worked to settle such conflicts for many years, although some of them persist.

Since the adoption of resolution 1265 (1999) and presidential statement S/PRST/2007/22 on this topic, the Security Council has been able to shed light on several basic factors that supposedly help to limit and address that phenomenon. I will mention the most prominent of them: first, strengthening the role of peacekeeping troops by implementing adequate mandates to enable peacekeeping operations to help the Governments concerned prevent natural resources from being exploited illicitly; secondly, supporting regional initiatives to limit the dangers related to the exploitation of natural resources, such as the Protocol against the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources in the Great Lakes region, the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative and the 2000 Kimberley Process, relating to blood diamonds, which has been a paradigm of cooperation; and thirdly, strengthening sanctions regimes by the Council, which must adopt *explicit mandates with specific terms of reference* for its panels of experts and monitoring teams so as to prevent the trafficking and illegal exploitation of natural resources. Nevertheless, preventive diplomacy based on dialogue and mediation, as well as arbitration, remains the best means to prevent conflicts, including those linked to claims pertaining to natural resources.

My country has been blessed with natural resources, and we know well that they can be linked to conflict. We experienced first-hand the catastrophic consequences of the disastrous occupation in 1990 on Kuwait and the countries of the world. Natural resources are not by themselves the only reason for conflicts and civil wars. The appropriate exploitation of natural resources could be the most important means for societies and countries to recover in the post-conflict period, leading to reconstruction and development.

History is full of examples of armed conflicts and civil wars resulting from the legal and illegal exploitation of natural resources, which fuelled them and were a reason for prolonging them. It is often the case that the exploitation of natural resources is the main reason for such conflicts and wars breaking out again. Natural resources are a divine blessing to be preserved but they can be used as weapons of war with serious consequences for the environment, the economy and public health at both local and regional level.

We have learned lessons from the environmental catastrophe that resulted from the Iraqi occupying forces setting fire to more than 1,000 Kuwaiti oil wells. That is an example of the misuse of natural resources and the environment during armed conflict. The State of Kuwait believes that such resources and the environment must not be used during armed conflict. For that reason, we proposed a draft resolution, which was subsequently adopted by the General Assembly (resolution 56/4), for the annual observance of 6 November as the International Day for Preventing the Exploitation of the Environment in War and Armed Conflict. Kuwait will also call for an Arria Formula meeting on 7 November in order to address preventing the use of the environment in armed conflict, as well as strengthening the international legal framework in that regard.

Poverty, hunger, inequality and the absence of good governance are among the most important reasons for the outbreak of conflicts, as mentioned by United Nations reports. We must look into the common factors that lead to tensions and cause the outbreak of conflicts. There are three economic indicators that we should consider: first, per capita income levels; secondly, the rate of economic growth; and thirdly, the structure of the economy.

There are fundamentals for building a stable State. It is important to implement the Sustainable Development Goals in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. We must strengthen our national capacities and manage our economies effectively, using comprehensive strategies to fight corruption, build institutions, strengthen the rule of law and diversify the economy. The United Nations can assist States and establish partnerships with them in that regard.

Finally, we want to emphasize that every State has the sovereign and genuine right to control and to exploit its own natural resources according to the Charter of the United Nations and international law. Clearly, natural resources, if used well, can be a basic factor for long-term economic growth and sustainable development. The State of Kuwait believes that natural resources are a divine blessing for many States. They must be the driver of sustainable development, the prosperity of countries and the well-being of their people. Managing natural resources in a legal, transparent and sustainable way at the national level is a priority for Kuwait. We preserve our natural resources and exploit them in the right way, while maintaining the security of our State and its national economy in accordance with the Constitution.

Mr. Skoog (Sweden): I thank the Secretary-General for his insightful briefing, good analysis and, as always, action-oriented approach. We thank the Bolivian presidency for providing another important opportunity for us to discuss the root causes that lead to or may lead to conflict. For the Council to be effective in its preventive role and in sustaining peace, it is crucial that we better understand and address the underlying drivers of conflicts. The root causes are different depending on the context. They can include violations and abuses of human rights, gender inequality, poverty and weak governance and very often they are a combination of several or all of those factors.

In July, Sweden hosted a debate in the Council on climate-related security risks, focusing on climate as a driver of conflict (see S/PV.8307). It is closely related to the issue that we are discussing today and one of the conclusions drawn at that debate was on the need for the United Nations to better understand and analyse those risks. The same can be said of today's issue. We also welcome the upcoming Arria Formula meeting on water and security. All such steps aim to improve our track record in preventing conflicts.

Natural resources are clearly a driver of conflict in many contexts. While resources such as oil, natural gas and minerals have the potential to confer significant benefits on populations and to improve development outcomes, they can also fuel instability and violence. The research presented in the joint United Nations-World Bank report *Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict* suggests that 40 to 60 per cent of intra-State armed conflicts over the past 60 years have been triggered, funded or sustained by natural resources. During the recent Council trip to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as has been referred to by my Peruvian colleague, we saw first-hand how the rich natural resources there have largely yet to translate into greater prosperity and stability for the broader population in the areas where most of those riches are found. In Liberia, disputes related to land tenure have long been a key cause of conflict. The Liberia configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission, which I chair, is therefore beginning to focus its work on the management of natural resources.

The United Nations system has a hugely important role in ensuring that natural resources are turned from the scourge of potential conflict into a common good for development, stability and prosperity. We truly appreciate the various actions set in motion by the Secretary-General, as outlined this morning, such as improved analysis and cooperation within the system, supporting regional cooperation and initiatives, strengthened mediation, including in hydro-diplomacy, offering capacity-building to countries, looking into the connection between land rights and conflicts and, of course, the general empowerment of women, including at the local level. Today I would like to point to three areas that can help to tap the opportunities and positive benefits of natural resources while mitigating the risks of them being a driver of conflict.

The first area is strengthening governance and national institutions. Natural resources are more likely to be a cause for conflict when there is a governance and public security vacuum. Functioning institutions to protect national interests, to uphold legal frameworks and to hold those operating outside the law accountable are therefore critical. Democratic and transparent national strategies for how natural resources are extracted and used are an equally important part of the equation. The implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as the Ambassador of Kuwait has just said, should be the logical starting point in that

regard. In line with Sustainable Development Goal 16, effective, accountable and inclusive institutions should be built at all levels. That includes tax and audit authorities that can develop fiscal policies and solid, trusted systems for public financial management.

The second area is fighting organized crime. Organized crime involving natural resources, for example through fuel smuggling and illicit mining, have become the largest source of income for non-State armed groups and international terrorist organizations. Those activities also contribute and are often connected to corruption and erode institutions and trust in the authorities, which in turn further spurs violence and violent extremism. Organized crime networks must therefore be forcefully addressed, including by enhancing the investigation and analysis of their linkages to the extractive industry. International cooperation and making full use of the United Nations tools on offer is recommended.

The third area is the important role of responsible business. The private sector has an important responsibility to make sure that business activities are sustainable and do not have a negative impact on conflict dynamics and basic human rights. To that end, businesses need to integrate corporate social responsibility models into their core operations. That requires dialogue with host Governments and, of course, civil society, including local communities.

African countries are now taking the lead in improving ownership models for extractive industries to better benefit their communities and citizens. We have just heard our colleague from Côte d'Ivoire talk about some of the African Union initiatives. Transparency is key to those efforts. There needs to be a better understanding of financial flows and banks have a particular responsibility, including at the international level. In that regard, the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative and the United Nations Framework Classification for Resources should be supported. Governments should also be encouraged to develop national action plans for business and human rights. The United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and the Global Compact should serve as a basis for those efforts.

As is the case with many of the root causes of conflict, challenges linked to natural resources do not recognize borders. They therefore require a national, regional and international response. The United Nations system, as well as other international organizations and bilateral partners, can help countries to reap the positive benefits of natural resources and to move away from a conflict-driven, informal and unprotected economy towards a transparent formal economy that can generate decent jobs and provide for social services such as education and health.

The Security Council, for its part, needs to do a better job of assessing root causes and taking a more holistic approach to addressing the conflicts on its agenda. That includes assessing and addressing the issue of natural resources, as well as other root causes, in a more structured and proactive way. In order to do that, what the Council needs first and foremost is for the regular reporting from the Secretariat to include more integrated analysis of the drivers of conflict. Gender analysis is a key aspect, as women are important actors in addressing the drivers and root causes of conflict. But the Council must also follow up such information with action. When it is relevant, peacekeeping missions should be mandated and given appropriate resources to that effect so that they can manage such drivers of conflict better, in close partnership with the broader United Nations country teams and other relevant actors. Targeted measures, including sanctions on individuals and entities — or indeed certain goods — involved in fuelling conflicts through illicit trade should also be considered.

The Peacebuilding Commission, with its broad agenda and a wider range of stakeholders, is well placed to complement and contribute to Council efforts to address the underlying causes of conflict, including the issue of natural resources. The Commission can also take a regional approach, which is often needed when it comes to these borderless challenges. Actors such as the World Bank, civil society and of course the private sector can and should be invited to discussions that provide advice on action to the Security Council.

In conclusion, we fully support the Secretary-General's vision of putting conflict prevention and sustaining peace at the centre of what we do. Addressing the root causes of conflict effectively, including by improving the transparent management of natural resources in order to benefit people, is a crucial part of that vision.

Mr. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank the Secretary-General for

participating personally in our meeting today and for his informative briefing on the subject.

The aspects that the Bolivian presidency touched on today relating to the issue of States' sovereignty over their natural resources are extremely important and are apparent in many of today's regional conflicts, as was rightly noted. Strictly speaking, however, these issues are beyond the scope of the Security Council's remit and belong in the mandates of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development and the Second Committee of the General Assembly. In that regard, in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the States Members of the United Nations reaffirmed that each one of them

> "has, and shall freely exercise, full permanent sovereignty over all its wealth, natural resources and economic activity".

Based on that principle, combating illegal activities in the extractive industries is also first of all both the prerogative and the responsibility of the Governments of the countries that own the resources. In that regard, the priority is assisting vulnerable States in strengthening their State institutions and applying sustainable environmental management models in the interests of socioeconomic development and trade.

Resolution 1625 (2005) and presidential statement S/PRST/2007/22 define the parameters for further work aimed at preventing the illegal exploitation of natural resources from fuelling armed conflicts. In our view, however, the Council's task in that regard lies not in conducting generic discussions but in ensuring strict compliance with the principles of sovereignty and non-interference in the internal affairs of particular countries and regions. We consider it unacceptable to politicize these issues by artificially assigning them conflict-generator status and thereby creating a basis for potential crises or worsening existing ones. We see many examples of how natural resources can become the object of competition, including in the form of armed confrontations both within and between States. As a rule, we see this kind of issue in countries with weak Government control over national mineral resources. However, armed conflict, whether domestic or international, can exacerbate the problems associated with their illegal exploitation, but we want to emphasize that such clashes are caused not by natural resources per se, but as a result of acts of aggression by various forces, and often external actors.

In such cases, what we could term "delayed-action mines" laid down in colonial times play a significant negative role. Former imperial powers also made use during the Cold War of schemes devised in those far-off times for plundering territories under their control. And in our own era, behind the opposing parties to conflicts we find players from outside the region or global corporations, while loud slogans about the struggle for democratic values are a mere fig leaf for commercially driven efforts to take over one or another country's natural wealth.

We believe that the right way to discuss this topic is in relation to situations in specific countries and regions. For example, the region of the Middle East and North Africa, rich in oil and gas reserves, has always been an area that big States have competed over. The energy issue was a significant contributing factor at the start of the period of shocks prematurely termed the Arab spring. The current crises in Syria and Libya are a clear illustration of the growing link between security and global competition for resources. The so-called international coalition, operating on Syrian land uninvited by the national Government and unsanctioned by the Security Council, has occupied the territory east of the Euphrates where oil and gas fields are located and together with its client structures has established what is essentially shadow hydrocarbon extraction. A policy aimed at reinforcing this state of affairs, violating Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity, is being carried out before our very eyes.

After the acts of aggression against Libya in 2011, the country became a springboard for external players' struggle for its rich natural resources, and it is still in a fragmented state to this day, despite all of the efforts of the United Nations to implement a model for a political settlement based on unifying the country and its State institutions. We would really like to see Libya's national wealth serve the interests of ordinary Libyans, not foreign corporations. And we do not have to look very far to find other examples in the Middle East, where we have the destabilization of Iraq due to a foreign invasion in 2003, as well as the war in Yemen. In both those cases, however, it was terrorist forces that at various points in time got access to their natural resources and used hydrocarbons primarily in order to fuel their destructive activities.

One of the reasons for the continuing turbulence in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo is the illegal exploitation and export of natural resources

in the interests of large transnational companies conducted by illegal armed groups to finance their activities. Suppressing this kind of activity would help to create the conditions for stabilizing the situation in the country and help it to develop.

The question of revenue-sharing from oil and other mineral resources is a serious factor in Somalia's centrifugal tendencies and has been an obstacle to the completion of federalization in Somalia. The agreement signed in June 2018 between Mogadishu and the federal states on the rights to the ownership, management and the sharing of income from the extraction of mineral resources was an important achievement. However, doubts remain about the parties' willingness to comply with those agreements.

The problems involved in controlling natural resources where the demarcation of maritime and land borders is concerned have the potential to become a source of inter-State conflicts, and there are many examples of that in Africa. Take, for instance, the situation concerning the ownership of major oil and gas fields in the coastal areas of the Gulf of Guinea, or the non-recognition of existing borders by the many tribes in the Sahara-Sahel region that have taken up arms to defend their rights to natural resources. The situation in South Sudan is another clear example in which both internal and external players are shamelessly trying to use the country's natural resources to enrich themselves.

The activities of various States and transnational corporations interested in getting access to the resource base of countries of the region is a significant destabilizing factor in a number of Latin American nations. Unfortunately, little has changed there in the twenty-first century, and the situations in Venezuela and Nicaragua are clear proof of that.

We believe it is both dangerous and short-sighted to blame all the problems in countries that are rich in natural resources and that are openly subjected to outside interference and pressure, including through sanctions, on the poor management of those resources. Framing the question that way is one short step from direct military intervention. History can teach us ruthless lessons about that, but there are many who do not want to take those lessons to heart.

The Russian Federation has consistently advocated for the importance of strict respect for States' sovereign right to manage their natural resources. Partnerships for their development should be mutually beneficial and based on unquestioning respect for the sovereignty of the host State. Those who claim the role of peacemaker and friend should have no hidden agendas or desire to take advantage of others' problems for their own mercenary, self-serving interests.

Mr. Ma Zhaoxu (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): At the outset, I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his briefing. I would also like to thank the Bolivian presidency for presiding over and convening today's important meeting.

Natural resources are the material basis for human survival and development and an important factor in peace and development for all countries. The illicit exploitation and trafficking of natural resources, as well as their misuse and unfair distribution, can potentially play a key role in triggering and fuelling conflicts and undermining peace. Security threats such as war, conflicts and terrorism all have roots in poverty and underdevelopment, and solutions to them must be found through development.

In order to address the issue of conflicts caused by the misuse of resources, we must help the countries concerned take full advantage of their natural resources and facilitate their efforts to industrialize and diversify their economies, enabling them to follow their own paths of sustainable development in line with their particular conditions. I would like to emphasize the following points.

First, the international community should respect States' irrevocable sovereignty over their natural resources in their territories, which is indisputable. The proper protection, exploitation and management of natural resources are a sovereign right and obligation. The exploration, development and utilization of natural resources should be decided independently by the Governments and peoples of individual States. Countries in conflict should pay greater attention to the proper use and management of resources, prevent their illicit exploitation and misuse in causing and fuelling armed conflicts, translate their rich resources into development advantages and enable all citizens to benefit from their dividends. In exploiting natural resources, multinational corporations and the private sector should respect the host countries' ownership and work sincerely to meet their corporate social responsibilities and give back to local communities.

Secondly, the Security Council should continue to play a constructive role in that regard, in accordance

with its own responsibilities and strengths. Considering its primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, the Security Council should place stronger emphasis on means such as good offices and mediation, focus on preventing and resolving conflicts and work effectively to meet its responsibility for maintaining international peace and security. Sanctions imposed by the Council are not an end in themselves and should be carefully targeted for a precise impact on organizations engaged in illicit extraction, while minimizing the effects on the normal exploitation conducted by the countries concerned.

Thirdly, the relevant United Nations entities should improve their coordination and work together to help conflict-affected countries to improve their management of resources. When formulating a comprehensive peacebuilding strategy, the Peacebuilding Commission should give greater priority to the management of natural resources in post-conflict reconstruction. United Nations field missions and development agencies should pool their resources and create synergies in order to support countries in conflict in improving their ability to exploit their own natural resources. The United Nations can provide assistance in the proper extraction, transportation and management of natural resources at the request of the countries concerned, and should promote the use of natural resources for sustainable development and social stability in all countries.

Fourthly, regional organizations and relevant mechanisms should play an active role in this area. In recent years, the African Union and other regional and subregional organizations have played an important role in encouraging cooperation among African States in building up their capacity for comprehensive natural-resources management. Mechanisms such as the Kimberley Process have been crucial in curbing the illicit trade in natural resources and should be encouraged to complement the efforts of the United Nations and its Member States and continue to contribute to the consideration and proper use of natural resources.

China is committed to defending and building world peace, based on the principles of equality, mutual benefit and win-win cooperation. China actively supports and helps other countries to properly develop, utilize and manage their natural resources. We consider coordinated economic, social and environmental development very important, as it helps the countries concerned to achieve sustainable development and ensures that local communities benefit. We will work with nations around the world to build a community with a shared future for humankind and leverage the positive role of natural resources in maintaining international peace and promoting common development, so that countries affected by conflict can overcome the curse on their resources as soon as possible, invest their natural resources in their peoples' pursuit of happiness and contribute to world peace and development.

Ms. Wronecka (Poland): Let me start by expressing Poland's appreciation to the Secretary-General for his briefing today. We also thank the presidency for recognizing the issue of natural resources in Council discussions of the root causes of conflicts.

While natural resources do not themselves cause wars, the competition for their access, control and illegal exploitation and trafficking can be a driver of armed conflict and play a role in post-conflict situations. On the other hand, we should not forget that natural resources can also create incentives for peacebuilding processes. To begin with, I would like to make few general remarks.

In many parts of the world, we are very concerned to see that access to natural resources and control over them can become a root cause of conflict, and it particularly affects countries that have rich deposits of oil, gas, gold, diamonds or other minerals. Despite their potential for social and economic development, they struggle with poverty, unemployment, epidemics and violence. Weak border controls and poor infrastructure are among the other factors that can aggravate such situations. Moreover, these countries often seem to fail to take into account the negative environmental consequences of their actions. The massive exploitation of natural resources can have a truly negative impact. The international community should not be silent when the environment is devastated, human rights are violated and a country's economic growth and sustainable development are hampered. We should never accept situations in which authoritarian regimes are supported merely to safeguard the interests of armed groups or companies that benefit from lucrative industries.

When considering the role of natural resources in the peace and security agenda, we must consider the issue's complex character and its relation to many other aspects. We believe that our debate must be carefully focused. Respect for international law should be a source of inspiration and a starting point for further

deliberations on the Council's role. That said, I would like to underline the key importance of international law, particularly the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and of the sovereignty of States, with regard to the ability to effectively address issues related to the control and illegal exploitation of natural resources and of access to them. We have a variety of international instruments at our disposal within the United Nations system and in the Council in particular. We must consider the full range of development, trade, security and diplomatic tools available.

I want to stress the key importance of transparency, good governance, the rule of law and cooperation in our shared responsibility among a wide range of actors, including regional organizations. While Governments are primarily responsible for controlling the use of natural resources, the engagement of the private sector is also essential. In that regard, I would like to point to the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme, the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative and the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights as examples of global standards and good practices for preventing abuses.

For the Security Council, I want to stress the need for a comprehensive and innovative approach, as the issue of natural resources and conflict concerns the actions of private companies and armed groups as well as Governments. We need an inclusive approach so that civil society and local communities can also be engaged in addressing the issue. The missions and peacekeeping operations of the United Nations and Security Council expert groups and sanctions regimes offer a variety of mechanisms and, as stated in presidential statement S/PRST/2007/22,

> "could play a role in helping the Governments concerned, with full respect for their sovereignty over their natural resources, to prevent the illegal exploitation of those resources from further fuelling the conflict."

In conclusion, while climate change, environment and water scarcity may not be the focus of today's debate, I want to emphasize the important role they play in our peace and security agenda. Today more than ever, the Council should take those issues into consideration, as we see that in many parts of the world climate change and environmental issues can become threat multipliers for conflicts and escalate tensions at the local and regional levels. We are ready to engage in further Council discussions on that issue.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): I would first like to thank the Bolivian presidency for organizing today's debate on what we consider an essential topic, as well as the Secretary-General for his briefing, which has given us a very informative framework for our discussions.

When we talk about natural resources, we are talking about extractive resources, including fossil fuels and minerals. But it also means soil quality, biodiversity and drinking water, all vital resources that are affected by climate change. Sustainable management of natural resources can and must be a factor in economic development. However, all too often the struggle to control them still helps to trigger, amplify or perpetuate deadly conflicts. In such situations, the challenge is to combine short-term action, which is critical for responding to urgent crises, with long-term efforts to address their root causes, which often include tackling the issue of natural resources. My message today is simple. We must work together to more effectively address this factor in conflict prevention, crisis management and support for political transition processes and sustainable development.

My first point is about prevention. The conditions that lead to conflict over natural resources are well known. When the revenues they generate are poorly distributed, when predators enter the picture, when the management of the companies involved is opaque or the stakeholders are not included enough in the decision-making process or the distribution of resources, the risk of conflict increases. That is true for internal conflicts or those sparked by actors from neighbouring countries. To better identify such precarious situations, we must encourage the sharing of analyses and diagnoses and develop early-warning mechanisms. We therefore call on the Secretariat to integrate the natural-resources dimension into its reports and to find the expertise required for that through the support of the specialized agencies of the United Nations.

Civil society and private actors can also make valuable contributions alongside Governments to improving governance in the exploitation of resources. Voluntary measures to improve revenue transparency are a step in the right direction for that, and here I particularly have in mind the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative. Encouraging the contribution

of civil society also means ensuring that advocates for environmental law and sustainable resource management everywhere are free to express themselves and protected against possible attacks. Lastly, we must support the tools of preventive diplomacy in the management of natural resources, such as the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes.

My second point is about crisis management. When a conflict breaks out, the revenues generated by the illegal exploitation of resources can help it to spread or persist. The Libyan crisis is a good example of that. The predations of the country's natural resources have encouraged many actors to maintain the status quo rather than back the political transition process proposed by Special Representative Ghassan Salamé and supported by the Council. That is also very clear in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Central African Republic, in the predatory activities of armed groups. In all those crises, the war economy is also a lopsided economy that adversely affects the people in two ways — they are deprived of the resources they need for development and they are the primary victims of the continuing conflict. Difficulties in accessing energy and natural resources during conflicts are also a factor in increases in sexual and gender-based violence. For example, women sometimes have to expose themselves to intolerable violence in order to bring home water and essential supplies. South Sudan is a particularly serious example in this respect.

In addition, women's inequitable access to resources hampers not only their empowerment but also the development of the countries concerned. It is therefore our duty to address this issue, as it is a factor in the perpetuation of crises. This we do when we adopt sanctions, in particular when we establish designation criteria linked to the exploitation of natural resources, such as the mechanisms established in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and in the Central African Republic. We can and must do more in this area, in particular by ensuring that we recruit specialized experts and by encouraging them to update the local and international intermediary networks that make such traffic possible.

Beyond Council action, the recommendation tools set up by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development to encourage multinational companies to adopt a responsible attitude are also very useful. Of course, this responsibility is generally based on central follow-up and transparency capacities. I would also like to laud the valuable contribution made by mechanisms for the certification and follow-up of commodities, such as the one for diamonds created by the Kimberley process, whose chairmanship is held this year by the European Union. We would like to see the gold sector also be subject to a certification framework, in the same spirit of cooperation between public and private actors.

My third and final point relates to post-conflict situations, which also require determined action on our part. Here security-sector reform poses a crucial challenge. In order to prevent and combat the illicit exploitation of natural resources in the long term, we must enhance both the operational effectiveness of the security forces and their transparency and accountability, focusing on this issue in the mandates adopted or renewed by the Council. In addition, when private service providers are charged by the extractive sector with providing site security, regulations must be in place that will ensure their professionalism and their coordination with the public authorities.

Peacekeeping operations can help host countries to strengthen the rule of law and, in so doing, contribute to creating a climate that is conducive to a rational and legal exploitation of natural resources that also takes into account the interest of the population. They will help the host country to exercise its sovereignty in this area as well. In that respect, we must also ensure that the conduct of United Nations staff is beyond reproach.

In post-conflict situations, land and land ownership issues are also very important, as we can see in Darfur. They are key factors in enabling the return of displaced persons and preventing the resurgence of conflict. Conflict prevention also involves recognizing and securing existing and determined property and usage rights, regardless of their origin or nature. We must pay particular attention to ensuring that the land rights of women are upheld, including in post-conflict situations.

Finally, I wish to underline the important role played by the Peacebuilding Commission with respect to countries in post-conflict situations that are dependent on natural resources. It provides an indispensable framework for bringing together all the components of the United Nations system and international financial institutions and for promoting best practices.

In the face of such a complex challenge, mobilization is vital across the board so that natural resources can become a driver of sustainable development rather than

fuel for current and future crises. Mr. President, you can rest assured of France's resolute commitment in this respect.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): Like other colleagues, I wish to thank you, Mr. President, for having brought this subject back to the Security Council's attention. I think that we have heard a lot of common themes today. While natural resources often bring great benefits to a country, they can also contribute to the outbreak of conflict and feed the conflict cycle. We have already heard from other speakers that at least 40 per cent of all intra-State conflicts in the past 60 years have had a link to natural resources, according to the United Nations.

Natural assets that ought to drive domestic economic growth all too often can be subverted and diverted. In Iraq, we have seen how Da'esh used oil resources to fund its campaign of terror. In Libya, competition for control of oil resources remains one of the key drivers of conflict. The trade in diamonds has driven conflicts in countries such as Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia and Sierra Leone. I was very interested in what our colleague from Côte d'Ivoire said about the total cost of this being something like $50 billion per year, exceeding aid budgets. That is a very telling figure.

Conversely, resolving disputes over control of natural resources can be a central pillar of peace processes. For example, oil was a crucial element of the peace agreement between Sudan and South Sudan. Beyond oil and diamonds, conflict over land and water resources is a growing risk. Population growth and climate change — and I wish once again to thank the Swedes for their excellent presidency debate on this issue (see S/PV.8307) — threaten to increase competition for natural resources and hence the risk of conflict. Sustainable Development Goal 12 calls for responsible consumption and production, which is integral to reducing the risk of conflict and achieving a sustainable peace.

National responses have, unfortunately, proved insufficient in tackling such complex challenges. We believe that a multilateral approach is critical and needs to be based on international cooperation and respect for the rules-based international system, including the relevant parts of international law.

A number of speakers mentioned sanction regimes, which can provide a useful tool for tackling the role of natural resources in perpetuating conflict. The Council has imposed sanctions on the trade in diamonds in Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Sierra Leone, and timber, for example, in Liberia. Calibrated sanctions on trading charcoal from Somalia, oil from Libya and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the absolute prohibition of the oil trade with the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham all have helped curtail the ability of spoilers to destabilize already fragile situations. But the success of these sanctions regimes, and hence our ability to mitigate or prevent conflict, relies on implementation by not only all Council members but also all of the other States Members of the United Nations.

In United Nations peace operations, our responses should be tailored to the context. We need to pay attention to the underlying causes of conflict, including, where relevant, to support countries in overcoming issues pertaining to the nexus between natural resources and conflict. That said, I just wanted to respond briefly to what the Russian representative said. Not all interventions are driven by negative motivations. It is important that the Council and countries be ready to address crimes against humanity. It is important that they be ready to address grave human rights abuses and important that we be ready to address the imminence of overwhelming humanitarian catastrophes. So I just want to place on record that we reject his descriptions of why Western interventions have been made over the past years.

A number of speakers also mentioned the Council's recent visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We heard how the illegal exploitation of mineral resources by armed militias in the eastern part of the country is fuelling conflict and imposing suffering on the civilian population. The value of goods smuggled across the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo border exceeds that of formal trade, with gold the most valuable component. So I was very interested in the ideas that the French representative put forward about including gold in an enhanced regime. If we are to end the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, we need to see an end to the smuggling of mineral resources. We support the role of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in helping the Government to address that.

We believe that we can also do more to identify and address risks related to natural resources in conflict through early warning systems and efforts to support

countries to alleviate potential triggers. We very much appreciate the work of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development in this respect. I share the French approbation of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative. There are also some other ideas that we believe are well worth exploring. Sweden had ideas around tax and audit and tackling organized crime, and China had an interesting idea around using the Peacebuilding Commission. We would be very willing to work with colleagues on the Council to try and advance such instruments.

The Kimberley Process was also raised. The United Kingdom is proud to be a founding member of the Kimberley Process, and we support the current reform process, designed to make the framework even more effective. In addition to the Process, the United Kingdom is committed to strengthening the international framework for regulation of the trade in minerals linked to conflict. I would like to highlight the mining and trading of tin, tantalum, tungsten and, as I have already mentioned, gold. These minerals are key components for modern technology. Under the right conditions, the mining of such minerals can build both prosperity and security for local communities. But otherwise, we end up with deplorable practices — from human rights abuses to the illicit financing of conflict.

We want to help to address such issues. We believe that we should be encouraging compliance with the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Supply Chains of Minerals from Conflict-Affected and High-Risk Areas. Implementation of this guidance becomes mandatory for the largest importers in the European Union in January 2021, and I can assure the Council that, even after Brexit, the United Kingdom will remain committed to this regulation. We also support the European Partnership for Responsible Minerals, which is a multi-stakeholder initiative comprised of Governments, civil society and the private sector. The Partnership is recognized by the European Union (EU) as an official accompanying measure to the EU regulation.

In conclusion, the role of the Council in tackling the problem of natural resources as a cause of conflict continues to be a very important instrument, which we should ensure that we use to the full.

Mr. Tumysh (Kazakhstan): We thank the Bolivian presidency of the Security Council and Secretary-General Guterres as briefer for drawing our attention to how natural resources have led to intense conflicts, political unrest and even the overthrow of Governments and to the urgent need to take action to maintain not only regional but also international peace and security.

As a Central Asian State, we express our appreciation to the Secretary-General for including in his briefing the comment that our part of the world stands as a good example of progress being achieved through consultations among neighbouring States with the support of the United Nations. As a member observer of the African Union (AU), we fully support and associate ourselves with the statement made by the representative of Côte d'Ivoire on behalf of the African troika. In that regard, we underline the crucial importance of the Arria formula meeting on silencing the guns in Africa and on how the AU partnership can contribute to a continent free of conflict, to be convened on 19 October under the sponsorship of nine Council members, including Kazakhstan. We also emphasize the significance of our President's initiative on building a world free of violent conflicts by the United Nations centenary in 2045, as mentioned in the presidential statement adopted in January (S/PRST/2018/1).

In modern international relations, the lack or abundance of natural resources — food, water, energy, oil and minerals — has taken a high human toll and prolonged tensions through the illegal exploitation of and trafficking in natural resources as well as their illicit trade, which are exacerbated not only by Governments but also by extractive industries of foreign or multinational origin, wealthy exploiters and even armed groups and militias to the detriment of local populations, as well as causing dire humanitarian consequences. Natural resources often lie at the heart of wars and civil unrest. The growing scarcity of resources can become an increasingly serious problem in the coming decades. In addition, the potential consequences of climate change for water availability, food security, the prevalence of disease, coastal boundaries and population distribution may aggravate existing tensions and generate new conflicts. The high demand for energy carriers to serve an expanding global population of more than 9 billion people by 2050 may raise the issue of accessibility to global energy supplies. Such a situation may provoke tensions between States, which will inevitably keep our world from becoming a better and safer place for succeeding generations, as evoked by the Charter of the United Nations.

The exploitation of natural resources must be accompanied by increased capacity-building of populations and contribute to the development of the economy in general. Otherwise, it will lead to the impoverishment of populations and the struggle for control over resources as a means of profit. This perspective applies to both local and foreign companies. In this context, Kazakhstan is a good example of a responsible State. Because we have sovereignty over our natural resources, we attract foreign investors on mutually beneficial terms and diversify the economy to fully meet the needs of the population. Changing this equitable paradigm would lead to instability and conflict.

As mentioned today by the Secretary-General, and according to the United Nations Environment Programme, more than 40 per cent of internal conflicts over the past 60 years have been linked to the exploitation of natural resources. In this vein, Kazakhstan views energy security as an instrumental factor in international stability. In our opinion, there are numerous and complex factors, including political, social and economic aspects, that remain key drivers of conflict. Natural resources alone are not the only determinant in the sorrowful equation of war and conflicts on the one hand and people's lives on the other.

The dispute over the control of natural resources has always been on the international agenda. The advantage we have today, in comparison to past millenniums, is the United Nations.

My country strongly advocates respect for the sovereignty of States over their natural resources, which is of crucial importance for the African continent, above all, as we witnessed during our recent visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. However, since the international community is also concerned by environmental degradation and the illegal exploitation of natural resources, a coordinated global approach is also required. Member States, together with the United Nations, must be at the forefront of the preservation of peace and the fair use of natural resources under the pillars of the United Nations — peace and security, sustainable development, humanitarian action —and in accordance with international law. We need to catalyse new thinking, reform and processes in each of the pillars, which, together with technical analysis and capacity-building, could become self-sustaining, and which partners and beneficiaries could scale up.

As with sustainable development generally, addressing issues of natural resources also requires a collective management system. This point was stressed in the high-level independent reports on peace operations and the peacebuilding architecture. Nowadays, contributing to the conservation of natural resources is an important part of the mandates of peacekeeping operations. We therefore support the wise vision that win-win solutions to today's conflicts should be found through development.

It is also highly necessary today to strengthen coordination among United Nations specialized agencies and programmes so as to render their work more efficient and practical and help them improve State mechanisms for managing natural resources in countries affected by conflict. The capacity of the United Nations to provide technical information on the status of natural resources and the environment, as well as to make recommendations on their sustainable use during mediation processes, should be further strengthened.

Since we have only one planet, we think that, as an integral part of its peacekeeping mandate, the Security Council needs to address the issue of natural resources and environmental impacts in the light of their great potential for fuelling conflicts. Environmental issues can therefore serve as an effective platform or catalyst for enhancing dialogue, building confidence, taking advantage of shared interests and broadening cooperation between divided groups, as well as among States.

Finally, we must always remember that it is people who are vulnerable and who suffer disproportionately in conflicts of any size or of any cause. International impunity nurtures this problem. Kazakhstan believes that a more equitable and balanced global partnership will provide a solid foundation for overall sustainable peace and development.

The meeting rose at 11.50 a.m.

United Nations S/PV.8373

Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8373rd meeting

Wednesday, 17 October 2018, 9:30 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Llorentty Soliz/Mrs. Cordova Soria	(Bolivia (Plurinational State of))
Members:	China	Mr. Ma Zhaoxu
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Ipo
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Sipaco Ribala
	Ethiopia	Mr. Woldegerima
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Tumysh
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Netherlands	Mr. Van Oosterom
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce
	United States of America	Mr. Cohen

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

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18-32500 (E)

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The meeting was called to order at 9.30 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Egypt, Germany, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, the Syrian Arab Republic and Turkey to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I now give the floor to Mr. De Mistura.

Mr. De Mistura: When I briefed the Security Council last month (see S/PV.8345), I said that we were approaching a moment of truth in the effort to convene a United Nations-facilitated, Syrian-led and Syrian-owned constitutional committee, which, at the moment, is the main outstanding item with regard to the way we should implement resolution 2254 (2015). Everything else is still on the table but that item remains the most important one at the moment. A credible and balanced committee could be the cornerstone of an inclusive political process for Syrians in the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015), which is the only one we have.

Yesterday, I consulted Secretary-General António Guterres at length and received very clear instructions regarding our accelerated effort to convene a credible and balanced constitutional committee — the only kind that the United Nations — and by that I mean the Secretariat — would be willing to convene and the only one with which it would like to be associated. I will return to those instructions later. But, first, let us be a bit more precise about where we are.

As I told the Council last month, some things are quite clear. The two lists of 50 names each for a constitutional committee submitted by the Government and the opposition, respectively, are not in question, but questions continue to be raised, mainly by the Syrian Government, about the composition of the middle third list of 50 names. Let me recall how we arrived at the middle third list, which is now on the table and which has been revised more than once and updated into a new list.

The final statement of the Congress of the Syrian National Dialogue, held in Sochi, spoke about the need to include "Syrian experts, civil society, independents, tribal leaders and women", with "adequate representation of Syrian ethnic and religious components". The Sochi final statement made clear that it was via the Geneva process and through the facilitation of the Special Envoy that a final selection would be made.

In truth, it went even further than that. The Secretary-General has asked me to remind the Council that, in addition to the terms of the Sochi final statement itself, an explicit United Nations-Russian understanding was reached during the Vienna consultation, which took place just before the United Nations attended the meeting in Sochi. The understanding was that I, as Special Envoy, would be free to draw not only on names emanating from Sochi, but also on other names, including, if necessary, those of Syrians who did not attend the meeting in Sochi, in order to form a balanced and credible list. Let me also recall that, in any case, resolution 2254 (2015) mandates the United Nations to convene parties in the political process and assigned to the Geneva talks the task of setting a schedule and process for drafting a new Constitution.

There should be no doubt that the middle third list was very carefully developed by the United Nations. We received input from and listened to many, including the guarantors and others. Moreover, we also did our own careful homework. We sought out credible and neutral Syrian experts, including people who had played a role in the previous Constitution-making process and could bridge and build upon the two sides and with whom the sides could work constructively. We look for respected civil society representatives, independents and other Syrians of standing — individuals who, as in any other constitutional process, could somehow represent the many Syrians who are not political affiliates but still deserve a stake in their future. Of course, we know that all Syrians, like all of us, have a political opinion or leaning, which is totally natural. But we sought a fair balance among the various political leanings so that no one side could dominate the committee. This is a very key part of what we consider to be the credibility and legitimacy of the list. We ensured the adequate representation of various ethnic, religious and regional

backgrounds, as well as a balance between those living inside Syria and the millions of Syrians, who, for the moment, are living outside their country due to the conflict.

Lastly, with the full support of the Secretary-General and as part of our commitment to giving full effect to resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security, we insisted that a minimum of 30 per cent of the constitutional committee should be women. This meant bringing many qualified and expert women of all backgrounds into the middle third, and indeed the proposed middle third is almost half women. That is what has guided United Nations efforts to facilitate the middle third and revise it into a new list, as has already been done. I have also carefully facilitated development as per resolution 2254 (2015) and the final statement of the Sochi National Dialogue Congress. They both stipulate that on a logical basis I should prepare some basic aspects of the process and rules of procedure that could enable the constitutional committee to work.

From the three lists of the Government, the opposition and the middle third, it would be possible to identify a smaller group, numbering 15 from each, to form a drafting body for the constitutional committee. The committee could be mandated to draft constitutional reform for popular approval, as a contribution to the political settlement in Syria, leading to a new political structure and giving effect to the Sochi final statement of 20 January. Within the context of the Geneva process to implement resolution 2254 (2015), such a constitutional reform could aim to embody in the Constitution and constitutional practices of Syria the letter and spirit of the 12 principles developed in Geneva at great length and with a lot of hard work, endorsed in Sochi, and offering the people of Syria a vision of a future that can be shared by all.

The constitutional committee could work in Geneva with an impartial Syrian chairmanship acceptable to all components, supported by United Nations facilitation and with appropriate decision-making arrangements. Of course, these arrangements should all be consistent with respect for Syria's sovereignty, unity, independence and territorial integrity. The United Nations facilitation should enable the Syrians themselves to engage with one another and independently and democratically determine their own future with dignity. Clearly, the key parties are the Syrian parties, but equally, the prospect of an effective constitutional committee also rests on strong support from key countries. They will be further engaged by us in the coming weeks.

Let me start with the Government of Syria. Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Al-Moualem met with the Secretary-General during the general debate of the General Assembly, a meeting that I also attended. At the meeting, the Foreign Minister voiced strong doubts about the Sochi final statement and its outcome, indicating that the Government had a very different understanding of those matters. He called for a fundamental reassessment of the work that had been done to date on the middle-third list and rules of procedure, as well as on the United Nations facilitation role. For his part, the Secretary-General reiterated the Sochi statement and its outcome, as well as the mandate of the Security Council, and offered to have me explain the work that has been done on it in much more detail. He appealed to the Foreign Minister to ensure that the Government could work in partnership with the United Nations.

For their part, two of the Astana guarantors, Russia and Iran, have also significantly questioned the middle-third list, indicating that it does not meet the Government's requirements, despite the extensive consultations and the Sochi understanding. At the same time, they have indicated that they are continuing to engage with the Government of Syria on the matter and indeed, as we speak, senior Russian officials will be visiting Damascus in the next few days. Turkey, which initially felt that our list could benefit from revision, has recently indicated its own full understanding of the logic and composition of the third list.

For its part, the Syrian High Negotiations Committee, as we call the opposition, confirmed to the Secretary-General during the general debate its readiness to move ahead on the basis of the broad package on the table. The opposition met at the beginning of this week in Riyadh, and most of the nominees for the constitutional committee are right now sitting together in internal consultations in order to prepare for their work. The small-group countries — Egypt, France, Germany, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, the United Kingdom and the United States — have all urged the United Nations to convene a constitutional committee without delay. Similar messages have come during the past few days from a large number of European and Arab Foreign Ministers with whom I met during the general debate.

I would like to inform the Security Council that the Government of Syria has invited me to Damascus next week in a follow-up to the meeting with the Secretary-General during the general debate. I plan to engage with them on the work that has been done on the constitutional committee. If the Council wishes, I will of course be ready to report back to it after my visit on whether those direct consultations have produced the approval of and agreement on a credible and inclusive third list, as we hope.

Before the end of the month I also intend to invite the Astana guarantors for consultation with me in Geneva and to engage with the small-group countries. In my view that would be our final opportunity to put the finishing touches to the preparations for convening a constitutional committee. I would then hope to be in a position to issue invitations to convene the committee, if possible during November. I can offer no guarantee as to whether this is possible, but what I do know after nine months of preparations is that it is important to launch a credible constitutional committee and that whatever transpires, I would like to come back and brief the Council in November on where we stand.

Let me remind us all that if steps are not taken towards achieving a safe, calm and neutral environment, the work of a constitutional committee would not end up being very meaningful. We all know that. But first things first. On the constitutional committee front, despite our best efforts regarding steps towards a safe, calm and neutral environment, we have seen very few concrete outcomes during 2018. I hope we will see more in the upcoming months. For instance, the Working Group on the release of detainees/abductees and handover of the bodies and the identification of missing persons, met again last week in Tehran. We continue to urge it to come up with its first tangible results, as many, many people in Syria are waiting for them.

Let us look now at the big picture for a moment before we go back to the constitutional committee. A catastrophe has so far been averted in Idlib and the Russian-Turkish memorandum of understanding appears to be being implemented. Major strides have been taken in defeating terrorism, and that should continue to be a priority. The territorial base of the Islamic State in Syria and the Levant has largely been erased, although it does remain dangerous. For the moment the de facto map of Syria today is relatively stable, but it must not become a de facto soft partition, nor a theatre for new international confrontations.

There must therefore be a political path forward. President Putin and President Erdoğan have said that the Idlib deal offers a window for the constitutional committee to be established and the political process to go ahead. The European Union, for instance, will host a third Brussels conference in March 2019, and we know that its decisions will depend on a credible political process. The United Nations has done all that it can — and, frankly, more — to find a way to convene a credible and balanced constitutional committee. We are ready to do more, and do it faster, during the upcoming months, taking advantage of the Idlib window of opportunity. However, we are not ready to convene a committee that is not credible and balanced.

In that regard, having consulted the Secretary-General, let me also give the Council a heads-up, if I may. I will myself be moving on, as of the last week of November. I have had the honour to serve for four years and four months as Special Envoy. For some time, I have been discussing with the Secretary-General my desire, for purely personal reasons, to move on. I deeply appreciate his constant support and wise counsel with regard to this matter, but I will definitely not say goodbye or engage in reflections today. A month can be a century in politics. We will continue to have a very intense and, hopefully, fruitful month ahead. I will not lay down my charge until the last hour of the last day of my mandate. In fact, the Secretary-General has instructed me that my last month of service should be used to actively verify whether or not the United Nations is in a position to convene a credible and balanced constitutional committee, and report to the Security Council accordingly. I plan to do so with clarity and frankness and count on the support of the Security Council and all Syrian counterparts to do so.

Let me summarize the bottom line of my message, which has been long.

First, the Idlib memorandum of understanding provides a unique window of opportunity for launching a credible and inclusive constitutional committee. We must take advantage of it. That is, and remains, our aim. Our assessment is that if there is political will, there is no reason for a constitutional committee not to be convened in November — 10 months after the Sochi declaration. Secondly, the main reason for the delay in convening in Geneva the first session of a credible and inclusive constitutional committee involves the difficulties that the Government has in accepting the current third list of participants prepared by the United

Nations in accordance with the Sochi declaration and resolution 2254 (2015). Thirdly, I plan to discuss that pending issue during my forthcoming mission to Damascus and report back to the Secretary-General and the Security Council thereafter on the outcome. Fourthly, since my personal plan, in consultation with the Secretary-General, has always been to end my mission, for purely personal reasons, in the last week of November — four years and four months after it began — my intention, and as per the instructions of the Secretary-General, is to dedicate this crucial last month to actively verify, once and for all, the feasibility of the implementation of a credible and inclusive constitutional committee, as well as the implementation of the Sochi declaration.

I will therefore report in November to the Secretary-General and the Security Council on the status of the implementation of the constitutional committee in order to allow the Secretary-General and the Security Council to draw their own conclusions, so that my own successor can start his or her own mission with a clean slate.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. De Mistura for his comprehensive and detailed briefing.

I would request members of the Security Council and those joining us in the Chamber to remember to turn off their cell phones and please focus on those taking the floor.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council wishing to make statements.

Mr. Cohen (United States of America): I thank Special Envoy De Mistura for his briefing and his hard work to prepare for political progress in Syria. We have before the Security Council today a very rare thing — a brief window of opportunity to advance a political solution in Syria. We should take it. History will be unforgiving if we fail to do so.

The United States has sought every opportunity to prevent the Al-Assad regime and its Russian and Iranian allies from pursuing a military end to the conflict in Syria. We have long called for a credible, inclusive constitutional committee that will begin the essential work of drafting a new Syrian constitution. That committee will lay the groundwork for free and fair elections in Syria, supervised by the United Nations and open to all eligible Syrians, including those who were forced to flee their country during the present conflict. The United States has worked long and hard for this progress in Syria, as have some others on the Security Council. That said, the United States did not always support Russia's January proposal for such a committee. We had concerns that that initiative would undermine the Geneva process. We had concerns about Russia's good faith. We had doubts about whether Russia intended to support a political transition in Syria and whether the proposed constitutional committee was a way for Russia to assert its influence over Syria rather than to blaze a path to peace, because, frankly, Al-Assad, Russia and Iran have the most to gain from pursuing a military end to the Syrian war. De-escalation zones have been established and ignored by Russia and the Al-Assad regime. Accountability has been resisted. Villages have been levelled. Humanitarian assistance has been denied. Weapons of mass destruction have been used. So yes, we had concerns.

In the eight months since the announcement, the United States has consulted with other Security Council members. We felt that if there were an opportunity to move towards a political solution, we should do everything possible to make it work. Today there is a consensus in the Security Council that a constitutional committee should be convened in Geneva immediately by the United Nations Special Envoy, as he wishes to do. We join in this consensus. Our Syria small-group partners have also rallied behind that idea. Egypt, France, Germany, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and the United Kingdom support the creation of such a group to map Syria's political future without delay, but it is starting to look as though our concerns may have been warranted. We see the Al-Assad regime using the same delaying tactics that have stalled the political process in Syria for years.

The Special Envoy has worked hard to prepare a diverse and credible list of Syrians to serve on the constitutional committee. The candidates are drawn from all parts of Syrian society. Many of them are experts in the law and the process of drafting a new constitution, and, just last month, Turkey and Russia announced an agreement in principle on lists of possible members of the committee, but now the Al-Assad regime is objecting to those lists. They now want veto power over the United Nations process. They have at the eleventh hour invited the Special Envoy to Damascus next week for new consultations after months of not engaging. We welcome Special Envoy De Mistura's offer to brief the Council on his Damascus trip as soon

as possible, and we hope that such briefing will take place before the end of this month.

The Syrian representative to the United Nations has told the Council that Damascus rejects Russia's own Sochi declaration that launched the constitutional committee. Syria rejected Russia's diplomatic initiative. Let us therefore be clear about what Al-Assad is up to. This is not a last-ditch attempt at diplomacy. This is another obvious attempt to delay the United Nations effort to forge a political consensus and a political solution. There can be only two purposes for these delaying tactics, neither of which speak well of the motives of Al-Assad and his Russian friends. Either they are attempting to create an unbalanced committee that will rubber-stamp the regime's positions, or they are attempting to forestall the vital work of the committee, which is the critical work of establishing self-government for the Syrian people. Let us remember what is at stake if the Syrian regime and the Russian Federation delay the creation of the committee. There will be no progress on the new Syrian constitution, no progress towards free and fair parliamentary and presidential elections, and no progress on a political solution. This moment of calm and opportunity, which has created the time and space for political progress, could well evaporate.

The United States does not share the view that a November launch of the committee is rushed or premature. Quite to the contrary, delay risks disaster. We have the lists of participants. The Security Council has had the road map for a political settlement since it adopted resolution 2254 (2015), in 2015. The Special Envoy has every authority to convene the committee and tells us that he is ready to do so. We believe that he should. Special Envoy De Mistura should set a date for the first meeting of the committee, issue invitations and move ahead with talks, and he should do so without delay. While some in this Chamber are in no hurry to move forward on the political process, there are 6 million refugees who cannot return home without progress on the 2254 process. The constitutional committee is only a very early step towards this. There are 3 million Syrian civilians in Idlib whose fate also hangs in the balance. The Syrian and Russian jets are grounded, for now. The heavy weapons have been removed from Turkey and Russia's demilitarized zone, for now. The ceasefire in Idlib has given us a window of opportunity, but it is a window that could close at any minute.

We remind the Council that resolution 2254 (2015), which was adopted without opposition in this Chamber, explicitly supports a nationwide ceasefire to accompany and reinforce the initial steps towards political transition. The United States has been clear; any military escalation in Idlib or beyond remains unacceptable and would gravely threaten efforts to find a peaceful political solution to this crisis. The Syrian people have been silenced for too long. We have a unique opportunity to forge a political solution to one of the most bloody and destructive wars of our lifetime. This moment of opportunity will not last long, based on all that we have seen in Syria over the past years. I urge my colleagues to resist further delays and take this historic opportunity.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura for his very informative briefing and exemplary commitment. I also wish to commend the exceptional work of the Special Envoy and reiterate to him France's full and entire support for the crucial month ahead of us.

Each of us is well aware that Syria is at a crossroads. It could either topple to military escalation in Idlib, which would open one of the darkest chapters of the Syrian tragedy, or take the demanding path of true political momentum towards a settlement of the conflict. It is our conviction that today, and perhaps for the first time in seven years, there is a narrow window of opportunity in this respect, and it is our collective responsibility to seize it. Today both the darkest and the most promising scenarios are possibilities; the choice depends largely on us and on the ability of the Council to unite around the option of peace — a step that, despite the tremendous difficulties of which we all are aware, is today within our reach. In that context, the creation of a constitutional committee can and should be the inflection point that we seek — the first stage of a genuine political dynamic. The establishment of that committee as soon as possible is therefore our priority today.

Staffan de Mistura has just presented us with a mixed picture — to put it mildly — of the progress made on the political scene. Ten months after the announcement of the establishment of the constitutional committee during the Syrian National Dialogue Congress, held in Sochi in January, that forum has yet to meet. Let us say it how it is; that stalemate is directly linked to obstruction by the Syrian regime, which ultimately tells us that it does not wish to take

part in the ongoing diplomatic efforts, while its allies are unable or unwilling to convince it to put an end to its intransigence. The lists from the opposition and the regime were sent to the United Nations several months ago, but the systematic obstruction by the regime and its allies on the composition of the third third of the committee has paralysed those efforts. I remind the Council that the Sochi Congress gave a mandate to the Special Envoy for the composition of that committee. It is our collective responsibility to firmly support him in his efforts and to call for an end to any obstruction to the implementation of the road map that we all agreed.

It is therefore imperative that the first meeting of the committee take place as soon as possible and with a clear time frame in order to put an end to these delay tactics. We are determined to support the Special Envoy in carrying out his work, and we need a specific date. I wish to inform Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura that, in keeping with the role accorded the United Nations in this process, he has all the room for manoeuvre that may be necessary to move forward. That is the thrust of the support that the ministers of the small group have publicly provided to him on the margins of the General Assembly. We also call for the committee, whose inclusivity is key, not to be stalled by unbalanced operating rules. It is incumbent on all Syrians, not just the regime in Damascus, to decide on their own constitution.

Finally, the political process cannot be restricted to the constitutional committee alone. This is only the first step in a process consistent with resolution 2254 (2015), which should in particular include an electoral process that is inclusive and credible and the establishment of a safe and neutral environment in Syria. We would also be interested to hear the thoughts of Staffan de Mistura on the regime's implementation of Law 10, which is of particular concern to us.

Secondly, I wish to come back to the situation on the ground. The agreement between Turkey and Russia has temporarily averted the prospect of a major humanitarian disaster. However, it offers the inhabitants of Idlib only a short respite; there are major challenges remaining. We will therefore continue to closely monitor the implementation of the agreement on the ground, calling for a long-term ceasefire. We must also do everything possible to guarantee the protection of civilians, including humanitarian and medical personnel, as well as ensuring full, safe and unhindered humanitarian access throughout Syrian territory. It is imperative that humanitarian aid remain independent, neutral and equitable. The objective remains the long-term avoidance of an offensive that would have disastrous migratory, humanitarian and security consequences for Syria and the entire region. Our efforts to avert a tragedy in Idlib must continue in parallel with our commitment to begin the work of the constitutional committee and, ultimately, to initiate a political process. Everything is connected; it is a question of breaking the cycle of violence in Syria and finally creating a space for a true political process.

In that context, what can we do in the coming weeks to support the mediation of the United Nations? France, along with its partners from the small group, strongly advocated the convening as soon as possible of a credible and inclusive constitutional committee to initiate the drafting of a new constitution. That is our road map for laying the groundwork for free and fair elections that are open to the participation of refugees and internally displaced persons, under the supervision of the United Nations, in a safe and neutral environment that protects the rights of Syrians and provides them with concrete guarantees, while preventing the regime from rendering the process meaningless. We will spare no effort to move forward on those priorities, which must unite us all. The members of the small group will continue to fully support the Special Envoy in that regard, and I welcome their participation today.

Let us not close the narrow window of opportunity that has opened for the formation of the constitutional committee, which offers the hope of initiating a political process aimed at resolving the Syrian crisis. If these efforts do not prove successful, we will return to square one, and 10 months of diplomatic efforts — including on the part of the Astana guarantors — will all have been in vain. The process of ending the crisis, with the return of refugees and the reconstruction that must accompany it, will be blocked over the long term before it has even begun. It is therefore time to use the next few weeks to ensure the convening of the first meeting of the committee. Given the gravity of the situation, waiting to see is not an option. That must be our common priority today, around which, on behalf of France, I call on all the members of the Council to unite.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): I thank the Special Envoy for his briefing and for all the work that he and his team do on the ground. I learn with personal regret of his intention to move on, much as I understand the reasons, and I will come back to that, if I may.

However, the Council and the entire United Nations owe him a tremendous debt because he has persisted with one of the most difficult portfolios that, I think, any representative of the Secretary-General can have in any conflict, and he has done so for four long years. We thank him very much for that. As I said, I will come back to that later. The war itself has gone on for even longer than his tenure. I think that he is the third Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, and the war has continued for seven very long, very gruesome and very awful years for the Syrian people.

I will start with Idlib, which represents a terribly important moment because 3 million civilians remain at risk there. We salute the work that the Turkish Government has done, working with the Russians to get the current situation in Idlib under control. If I may cite the Emergency Relief Coordinator, we hope that that is a reprieve and not a stay of execution. However, I think that everyone on the Council remains fearful that the Idlib agreement will not hold. My first point is therefore that the Council should do everything that it can to support the Special Envoy and Turkey in having the Idlib agreement be preserved.

Secondly, as the French Ambassador said, the humanitarian situation still remains very difficult and very challenging. There has been progress in certain areas, but it is not the case that aid is reaching all those who are truly in need. We therefore also call on everyone on the Council to redouble efforts to support the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the International Committee of the Red Cross and others in getting aid through. We call on the Russian and Syrian Governments to ensure that the aid is delivered on the basis of impartiality and need.

As the Special Envoy said, Idlib represents not only the potential salvation of 3 million civilians but also a window of opportunity for the peace process. My United States and French colleagues set out very clearly how that could be taken forward. I just want to add the United Kingdom's voice to what they said. The Special Envoy described exactly how the constitutional committee should be constituted, how it might work and the sort of matters that it could look at. Under resolution 2254 (2015), that was supposed to have been set up within six months.

Frankly, on our side, it defies belief that the Syrian Government cannot work with what the Special Envoy has set out. I agree with the United States representative that the fact that the Syrian Government cannot work with the constitutional committee as set out either calls into question Russian good faith in brokering that deal in Sochi in the first place or shows that the Russian Government does not have power and influence in Syria. I think that both those things are quite dangerous for the potential of the Syrian political process and that we should spend some time thinking through the consequences of there being no progress at all on the constitutional committee.

Even at this stage, we would appeal to the Syrian authorities to make every conceivable effort to work with the United Nations to bring the constitutional committee into being along the lines that the Special Envoy set out. We completely agree with him and the Secretary-General that the United Nations cannot be involved in this charade and that the constitutional committee must be a genuinely credible and representative process. As the French Ambassador said, it is not the only part of the political process. Working with the United Nations on a broader political process is not a threat to Syria's sovereignty, territorial integrity or unity. All the experience of the Council over very many decades — but, in recent times, from the Balkans to Africa and the Middle East — shows that where there is conflict that is as divisive, as awful and as damaging as the Syrian conflict has been for the past seven years, there needs to be a representative political process if the country is to be stable and coherent and, above all, for it to reintegrate back into the international community. I assume that the Syrian people really want those things.

We therefore take the opportunity today to call on the Syrian authorities to put aside self-interest and to engage with United Nations and the broader political process. We call on them to ensure sustained humanitarian access, as I said earlier, but we also call on them to put an end to policies and practices that create obstacles to displaced people and refugees returning home and rebuilding their lives. We call on them to start progress towards creating a safe and neutral environment, in which all Syria's communities, regardless of religion or ethnicity, can thrive and be fairly represented.

Moving on to the Special Envoy's visit to Damascus. I hope that he goes with the Council's full support in delivering the Secretary-General's clear and direct message to the Syrian authorities. We thank him for the offer to come back to the Council and to brief us further. As others have said, it is of such vital

importance that we seize this opportunity. The Special Envoy will always be welcome in the Council at any time, but I hope that he will err on the side of keeping the Council updated as to how his talks are going.

The Special Envoy mentioned the Brussels conference. I again want to be very clear: the sort of reintegration of Syria into the international community and the coherence and stability that need to flow from a genuinely representative political process will need money for reconstruction, including from the West. That is also a lesson of all conflicts that we have dealt with collectively over the past few decades. I take this opportunity to reiterate — as I am sure the Brussels event will — that we will not provide reconstruction assistance for Syria absent a credible political process leading to a settlement that is genuinely in the interests of all Syria's communities. To do otherwise would be to see the awful seven years that have bedevilled Syria repeated time and again until we are all locked in the most vicious of spirals. Syria needs to overcome the factors that, seven years ago, led in the first place to the conflict with which we are now all struggling. That cannot be done by ignoring help from the United Nations or by it turning its back on the international community. I hope that the Syrian representative will be able to transmit those messages to his authorities in advance of the Special Envoy's visit to Damascus.

I will save a fuller tribute to the work of the Special Envoy for when we get his final thoughts and advice on what follows in the future after November. I welcome the fact that he has said that he will be honest, direct and clear. We look forward to that.

We hope that he will give us unvarnished advice on what to do next. We hope that the outcome of that will be a way in which the United Nations can assist the people of Syria in coming to a political settlement, but we must also contemplate other scenarios, unless we see movement from the Syrian authorities. It is a defining moment. I hope that the Council will be able to support him fully, and I look forward to hearing his future account.

I would like to close by expressing our deepest thanks on behalf of the British Government for everything that he has done in working for the United Nations on this most difficult of dossiers.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, we would like to thank you, Madam President, for holding this meeting. We also thank Mr. Staffan de Mistura for his detailed and comprehensive briefing, and we renew our appreciation and support for all the efforts that he is making to activate and advance a political settlement, especially his most recent efforts to establish a constitutional committee. I would like to join Ambassador Karen Pierce of the United Kingdom in taking this opportunity to express our deep appreciation for the intensive and earnest efforts that Mr. Staffan de Mistura has made over the past four years in his very difficult task. We also commend his commitment to continue working until the very last day of his mandate.

The international community finds itself at an important and sensitive stage of the political process to resolve the Syrian crisis. As my colleague the Ambassador of France has said, we are now at a crossroads. On one side, we see a bright and illuminated path with clearly defined landmarks, in accordance with the 2012 Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) and Security Council resolution 2254 (2015). That path gives us hope that we can put an end to the crisis that Syria has been enduring for the past eight years. On the other side of that crossroads, we find a dark and difficult path riddled with obstacles and fabricated impediments, which could take us back to square one.

Nine months after an agreement was reached in Sochi to form a constitutional committee, and after many rounds of negotiations over the three lists with the relevant parties, we had hoped to see a launching of the committee's work. However, it is clear, as we have just heard from the Special Envoy, that no progress has been made. In that context, we hope that the visit of Special Envoy De Mistura to Damascus next week, which he just announced in his statement, will lead to results that will facilitate the launch of the committee's work. We look forward to hearing his briefing on the outcome of his visit soon.

We call for an intensification of efforts aimed at an early launch of the work of a credible constitutional committee that is inclusive of all segments of Syrian society. We believe that this would constitute an important landmark in the Syrian political process and would push it forward. It is a first step in a political transition that would include drafting a constitution and holding free and fair elections in accordance with such a new constitution, under the supervision of the United Nations and in line with the highest international standards of transparency and accountability. We hope that all Syrians, including members of the diaspora, will

participate in the elections, in keeping with resolution 2254 (2015).

We were on the brink of a humanitarian disaster a month and a half ago because of a potential military escalation in the province of Idlib, which is home to approximately 3 million people, most of whom are innocent civilians. The Council, which has adopted a policy of preventive diplomacy, played an important role in shining a spotlight on Idlib by holding a series of meetings dealing with the possibility of a humanitarian crisis in the event of a military escalation in Idlib. We all followed the agreement that was reached in the Russian-Turkish memorandum of understanding, which helped de-escalate the situation and averted what we had most feared. As the deadline for that memorandum of understanding draws near, we call for intensifying efforts to sustain the ceasefire, not just in the province of Idlib but throughout Syria, pursuant to resolution 2401 (2018), which was unanimously adopted by the Council in February to protect civilians and guarantee unimpeded humanitarian access to those in need throughout Syria.

The State of Kuwait reaffirms today, and every day, that there is no solution to the crisis in Syria other than a political one that is agreed by all segments of the Syrian population, achieves their legitimate aspirations and preserves the unity, independence and sovereignty of Syria.

In closing, as I mentioned earlier, we are at a crossroads, and the next few days will determine the path that the political process will take. There is an urgent need for international political will and intensified diplomatic efforts by all parties at the highest levels over the next few days in order to achieve a political settlement and to put an end to the suffering of the Syrian people and the repercussions of that destructive crisis on the stability and security of the region and the entire world.

Mr. Ma Zhaoxu (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): At the outset, I wish to thank Special Envoy De Mistura for his briefing. I appreciate his tireless efforts in seeking a political settlement to the question of Syria.

The political process in Syria has recently gained positive momentum. The memorandum of understanding on the stabilization of the situation in Idlib's de-escalation zone, which was signed by Russia and Turkey, is, in broad strokes, being smoothly implemented. Heavy weapons and armed groups are being withdrawn from demilitarized zones. China welcomes the gradual stabilization of the situation in Idlib and appreciates the efforts made by Russia and Turkey.

We hope that the ceasefire in Syria will be sustained, thereby creating the conditions for the establishment of the constitutional committee and Geneva peace talks. China also welcomes the reopening of border crossing points between Syria and Jordan, which will restore a major trade channel in the Middle East.

The political process in Syria still faces challenges. Terrorism continues to threaten the security and stability of Syria and to hamper reconstruction and the return of refugees. The international community must remain united, coordinate its efforts, cut the supply chain of funds and weapons to terrorists, prevent the resurgence of terrorism and consolidate the achievements made in counter-terrorism. China has always believed that political negotiations are the only feasible solution to the question of Syria.

First, the international community should seize the opportunity offered by the alleviation of the situation in Syria and revitalize the political process there. The key now is to work steadily to establish the Syrian constitutional committee, which must be representative of and acceptable to all. The international community should remain committed to the mediation efforts taken up by the United Nations and Special Envoy De Mistura, relaunch the Geneva peace talks as soon as possible, further leverage the role of the Astana process and facilitate full dialogue and consultations among all the parties in Syria.

Secondly, the countries of the region should take action based on their long-time interest in the overall stabilization of the region and play a constructive role in seeking a political settlement. Achieving peace and stability throughout the entire territory of Syria remains an arduous task. We hope that all the parties will fully respect the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Syria, jointly ensure the effective functioning of the Idlib demilitarized zone, stabilize the overall situation in Syria and create the necessary conditions and environment for its political process.

Thirdly, the Syrian Government and the opposition parties must proceed in accordance with the fundamental interests of the country and its people, the principle of a Syrian-led and -owned process and resolution 2254 (2015). They must promote the political

process, settle differences through negotiations, foster national reconciliation and work gradually to arrive at a political settlement that fits with Syria's reality and addresses the legitimate concerns of all the parties, whom we encourage to initiate measures conducive to reconciliation and enhance mutual trust.

China is ready to join hands with the international community to further support the political process in Syria and to contribute to improving the humanitarian situation in Syria and restoring peace and stability in the country and the region.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We are grateful for the convening of this meeting and we thank Mr. De Mistura for his important briefing.

We have been closely following developments in Syria in the wake of the agreement reached in September between Turkey and the Russian Federation on the establishment of a demilitarized zone in Idlib, which has averted the humanitarian disaster we all feared. We emphasize the important role that Turkey and the Russian Federation have been called on to play in order to guarantee the ceasefire. In that regard, we want to point out that their efforts must be guided by international humanitarian law and by the need to respect the sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic.

We also want to highlight the removal of heavy artillery from the demilitarized zone and encourage the parties to make further progress in implementing the agreement, thereby encouraging an easing of tensions and improving the necessary ability to distinguish between civilians, rebel groups and terrorists. We believe that this progress should bring the parties to the conflict to a situation that is more conducive to achieving a political settlement with prospects for a lasting peace in Syria. In that regard, the international community is hoping that an inclusive, credible and representative constitutional committee will be established and can start work. More than eight months after the Sochi National Dialogue Congress, we hope that a date can be set for the commencement of the committee's work, as indicated by the Special Envoy. We hope that the upcoming meeting in Geneva between the Astana guarantors and the Special Envoy, as well as their consultations in Damascus, will produce tangible results with regard to the committee's formation, operating mechanisms and decision-making. We note that further delays would pose a genuine risk to the credibility and legitimacy of the process.

We also believe that confidence-building and reconciliation measures should be adopted between the parties. In particular, we expect to see substantive developments in identifying missing persons, the handing over of human remains and the release of detainees and missing persons. It will also be essential to address the plight of the millions of refugees and internally displaced persons, which will require the political will and adequate financial resources needed to ensure their return under safe conditions and in a dignified manner, in accordance with internationally accepted standards. Their property rights must also be respected. We would also like to remind all parties of the importance of making progress on accountability for the heinous crimes committed during the protracted Syrian conflict.

I want to stress how important it is that the Astana guarantors and other countries with influence over the parties to the conflict help to prevent further escalation and take concrete measures, such as the commencement of work by the constitutional committee, to advance the political process in line with resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex).

Lastly, I must mention our special gratitude to and recognition of Mr. De Mistura for the hard work he has continued to do not only to achieve a political solution, but also to avoid escalations that could have caused the Syrian people further suffering, as we have witnessed in recent months. We are saddened by the announcement of his departure, but we understand his reasons, and we hope we will still be able to count on his valuable counsel and experience.

Ms. Wronecka (Poland): I would like to thank Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, for his very comprehensive briefing, and to express Poland's gratitude for his efforts to find a political solution to the Syrian crisis. I would like to reiterate Poland's support, especially at this crucial time in his consultations with the various parties. I would also like to share some reflections with the Council.

The conflict in Syria has caused suffering to millions of people who are forced to find refuge in other countries and who face starvation and armed offensives inside Syria, along with constant violations of human rights and international humanitarian law. In a broader political perspective, we welcome the agreement on

Idlib between Russia and Turkey. At the same time, Poland wants to point out that it is the duty of the Astana guarantors to protect the most recent de-escalation zone in Syria, which they made a commitment to safeguard. The measures necessary to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure must be ensured.

We strongly believe that the Idlib ceasefire agreement is an opportunity for the resumption without delay of the political process under United Nations auspices in Geneva. In that regard, we express our full support for the Special Envoy's efforts to establish a constitutional committee as soon as possible. As has been repeatedly said in this Chamber, it should be implemented right now as a priority, and further steps should swiftly follow in order to enable a negotiated political transition process. It requires the full and constructive engagement of all the parties to the conflict, especially the Syrian authorities, in participating in the negotiations in good faith and without preconditions.

Let me conclude by underlining that a political solution must be brokered in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex). There is no military solution to the conflict that can bring sustainable peace to the Syrians, and we should focus on achieving an intra-Syrian framework political agreement. It is for the Syrians themselves to negotiate, and that is why we desperately need to revive the United Nations political process in Geneva. Only a real, tangible political process that ensures the true representation of the Syrian people can set a timetable and provide procedures for drafting a constitution and conducting free and fair elections supervised by the United Nations.

Mr. Tumysh (Kazakhstan): We thank Special Envoy de Mistura for his comprehensive and very informative briefing today. My country acknowledges and greatly values his unfailing commitment to seeking a peaceful solution and progress for Syria.

Kazakhstan therefore welcomes the memorandum signed on 17 September in Sochi by the Defence Ministers of Russia and Turkey on stabilizing the situation in the de-escalation zone in Idlib in Syria. We call on all the parties in Syria to cooperate in implementing the agreement and ensuring safe and unimpeded humanitarian access to all areas through the most direct routes. We stress the need to forge a durable political solution in line with resolution 2254 (2015).

We hope that the agreements reached in Sochi are expeditiously implemented, with full respect for international humanitarian law and the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Syria, based on the preference for continued dialogue. This option is timely for preserving and consolidating what has been achieved, and we are convinced that the agreement has created an opportunity to jump-start political talks.

Thanks to recent positive developments, we estimate that across much of the country the situation is now calmer than it was before. But we agree that humanitarian needs remain substantial and call on Member States to come forward to mitigate the situation. We commend the Special Envoy's attempts to involve different States of the Middle East, the Gulf region and Europe in this process. In the current phase, the coordination of regional and international efforts should take advantage of the momentum in this regard, in order to promote the innovative regional paradigm that is needed to support both the Geneva and Astana processes. We must take all necessary measures to uphold the ceasefire and promote the peace process.

Kazakhstan underlines the importance of achieving a political solution in Syria, especially through the formation of a genuinely credible and inclusive constitutional committee as a major step towards reaching a political settlement to the crisis. Astana fully supports the Special Envoy's efforts aimed at achieving a comprehensive settlement, especially in the crucial months ahead, and looks forward to achieving tangible results. We wholeheartedly wish the Special Envoy a fruitful visit to Damascus next week.

We also emphasize that it is the Syrians themselves who should begin to shape the future political system of the Syrian State, with the necessary legislative reforms, a territorial and administrative structure, and presidential and parliamentary elections. Only a politico-diplomatic approach, confidence-building measures and political goodwill — in the spirit the Charter of the United Nations and Security Council documents on preventive diplomacy and sustaining peace — can bring proper and full results.

There is therefore a strong need to continue supporting the aims of the Astana talks and additional Geneva negotiations in order to see positive outcomes. We believe that the Syrian people are capable of determining their own future. However, fulfilling their

aspirations for democracy, reconstruction and stability is impossible without genuine international support.

Finally, based on its analysis of recent events, Astana believes that the evolution of the situation in Syria has laid the foundation for a qualitative change for the better — the final elimination of terrorists on the country's territory, the beginning of a real political process, the revival of economic activity and the return of refugees to their homeland.

Mr. Van Oosterom (Netherlands): First, I would like to thank the Special Envoy for his very clear and comprehensive briefing. I also wish to convey our deep appreciation for his persistence and resilience and for his continuous efforts in the last years to bring us closer to a political solution. We welcome his commitment to going the extra mile in the remainder of his term in office. We will miss him.

I would like to focus on three points today — first, the need to swiftly convene the constitutional committee; secondly, the need for sustained de-escalation in Idlib; and thirdly, the need to address issues related to reconstruction aid and the return of refugees.

On my first point, the convening of the constitutional committee is long overdue. There have been too many delays. The committee should convene as soon as possible and move ahead with the creation of a new Constitution. The constitutional committee is not a goal in itself: as others have said, it is part of the broader United Nations-led political process based on resolution 2254 (2015). Only when the constitutional committee itself is credible can one speak of a credible political process. Inclusiveness and representation of all Syrians is key. We repeat our strong support for the Special Envoy in this regard.

We are concerned about the Syrian regime's actions, which have led to the delay in the establishment of the constitutional committee. We support Mr. De Mistura's commitment to having women constitute 30 per cent of the committee's members. In our view, any future drafting subcommittee should also include having a floor of women's representation set at 30 per cent. We feel very strongly that the Security Council should unite behind the Envoy's ambition to convene the committee soon.

That brings me to my second point, the need for sustained de-escalation in Idlib. We welcome that the memorandum agreed between the Russian Federation and Turkey has largely been respected. It has led to de-escalation in the area. It is now important that the agreement be sustained. We are concerned about signals from Damascus that the current situation is only temporary. We must do all we can to prevent an all-out offensive, as that could only lead to an international confrontation and a humanitarian catastrophe.

Unimpeded and unconditional access for principled humanitarian assistance is absolutely necessary. This applies both to cross-border and cross-line assistance, and it should be based on independently assessed needs. We are concerned that the Organization's humanitarian access continues to be constrained in areas where the regime has reasserted control, such as in eastern Ghouta and Quneitra. We feel that it is important that the Russian Federation use its influence to ensure that the Syrian Government facilitates the Organization's sustained and unfettered humanitarian access.

That brings me to my third point — issues related to reconstruction aid and the return of refugees. We strongly disagree with premature calls for reconstruction aid and the return of refugees. There will be no reconstruction aid from the European Union for Syria until there is a lasting political transition in Syria. It is inconceivable to start rebuilding when the possibility of a massive attack still looms over Idlib. We acknowledge the positive developments for the civilians of Idlib from the Russian-Turkish agreement, but we have to be realistic — the situation can change rapidly. It is inconceivable that the international community will rebuild a country in the absence of a negotiated political solution.

The international community should not normalize relations with a regime that is credibly suspected of perpetrating crimes against humanity and of war crimes. We need accountability for those crimes. Let me stress again our support to the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011, a French initiative on fighting impunity. We see the referral of the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court as the best path forward to fighting impunity.

Let me also refer to the statement made by eminent jurists on 24 September that sets out clear standards for reconstruction in Syria. These jurists' legal opinion is that "without adherence to these standards, the

provision of reconstruction assistance can facilitate past, continuous or new violations of international law, which would in turn give rise to complicity or shared international responsibility."

With regard to premature calls for the return of refugees, Syria is simply not ready for the safe, voluntary and dignified return of refugees. Voluntary return can only be facilitated when the internationally agreed protection thresholds are in place. The involvement of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is crucial for monitoring the protection of Syrian civilians. Many Syrians cannot go back. They fear the lack of security. They fear retributive violence, persecution and imprisonment. They fear security screenings and forced conscription. They often have no homes to return to due to the consequences of housing, land and property laws, such as Law Number 10, which is currently being implemented, despite earlier reports that its implementation had been suspended. Arbitrary arrests that contradict reconciliation agreements are another reason that Syrian refugees fear going back.

Furthermore, we are concerned about the recent amnesty law, as it does not differ from previous amnesty laws. The biggest flaws remain the same — the law is not applicable to opposition fighters nor does it provide for exemption from military service. It seems the Al-Assad regime adopted this amnesty law to extend its ability to recruit new troops.

Our focus needs to be on real confidence-building measures. The regime should release those unlawfully held in detention, reveal the fate of the missing and prevent further forced disappearances and detentions. So far, it has not done any of these things.

The approach to detainees must be part of a comprehensive political solution — not an afterthought. Securing the release of detainees is critical to Syria's future. Release can build confidence and can provide hope for reconciliation. The issue needs to be properly addressed with genuine progress under the auspices of the United Nations, as part of the official United Nations-led process in Geneva. The United Nations, and in particular the UNHCR, needs access to those currently detained in detention facilities. That could be a start.

In conclusion, it is clear that fundamental structural changes are needed in the administration of Syria. An inclusive political transition must be the starting point, and the convening of the constitutional committee is an important first step. There should be no reconstruction aid before a lasting political transition takes place. Last but not least, there is no peace without justice.

Mr. Skoog (Sweden): I would like to start by thanking Mr. Staffan de Mistura for his comprehensive and forward-looking update to the Security Council today. We commend his continuous and tireless efforts towards reaching a political solution and bringing an end to the conflict in Syria. I want to echo the regret other speakers have expressed about his mission coming to an end, and, naturally, to send him a very strong message of admiration and gratitude for the work he has done. Of course, the mission remains ongoing, and, as always, we stand behind him fully. He has our full support, including for the way ahead he has outlined today and the immediacy with which he will pursue it in coming weeks.

We welcome the fact that Turkey and Russia have reached an agreement on a ceasefire in Idlib. A military offensive in Idlib would not only have catastrophic humanitarian consequences, but it would also have put at risk a political solution. We now look to the Astana guarantors to live up to their commitments as well as their obligations under international law, and to safeguard the last remaining de-escalation zone in Syria until a peaceful settlement can be reached.

The ceasefire in Idlib offers an opportunity to reinvigorate the United Nations-led political process. This is an opportunity that must be seized. As agreed by the Council, the first step towards a sustainable political solution, in line with resolution 2254 (2015), is the establishment of a constitutional committee. We must now join efforts, support and insist on the swift establishment of the committee. The Special Envoy has full authority to decide on its composition, procedures and time frame, as well as our support.

It is critical that the constitutional committee is credible, balanced and representative of the Syrian people and reflects the diversity of the country. It needs to include Syrians from different ethnic, religious and geographical backgrounds in order to meet those criteria. Furthermore, women's full, effective and substantive participation is important for the legitimacy of the committee. We support the Special Envoy's determination expressed here today to ensure that a minimum of 30 per cent of committee and subcommittee members are women, including

the subcommittee that will draft the constitutional reform. Women's meaningful participation is — as we all know — necessary for sustainable peace and development in Syria — as elsewhere.

In line with the express support of the Council for the swift establishment of the constitutional committee, we encourage the Special Envoy to continue his efforts to set up the committee as quickly as possible. We therefore call on the Syrian parties, in particular the Syrian Government, to engage constructively with the Special Envoy and to contribute to the United Nations-led process as well as within the committees' proceedings once convened. We also expect all members of the Council and other relevant actors to move from words to action and actively support the efforts of the Envoy and his mandate to set up and decide on the composition of the committee. We note the envisaged visit to Damascus next week and welcome Mr. De Mistura's offer to update the Council on progress immediately after the visit has been completed. Needless to say, the content and assessment of that report will be very important.

The Syrian people have endured unspeakable suffering for too long. The agreement on Idlib has delivered some modest but concrete and much-needed relief. The agreement can and should be used to reinvigorate the United Nations-led political process. Only the United Nations has the legitimacy and the credibility for a viable and enduring political solution in line with resolution 2254 (2015). As others have said, Syria has reached a fork in the road. As Council members we must shoulder our responsibility and send a strong and unified message in support of United Nations efforts. We must also step up our joint efforts towards the road that leads to a credible political solution.

Mr. Woldegerima (Ethiopia): We join others in thanking the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, for his comprehensive briefing today. We very much appreciate and support his untiring diplomatic endeavours to relaunch a credible political process with a view to resolving the Syrian crisis. We know that his has not been an easy job, and we understand his decision to move on. But we continue to support him in his efforts in the coming days, which are going to be very critical.

Last month, the Council expressed its concern about a possible humanitarian catastrophe in Idlib (see S/PV.8345). This potential humanitarian tragedy has been averted due to the agreement reached between the Presidents of Turkey and Russia to establish a demilitarized zone in Idlib. In this regard, we recognize that measures are being taken to implement the agreement.

At the same time, as can be expected in such complex situations, we also understand that there are challenges to fully operationalizing the agreement within the set deadlines. What is important is to continue to work together to sustain the implementation of this important agreement. In this regard, we appreciate and support the continued efforts of Turkey and Russia. All those members that have influence should also support the full implementation of the agreement. In addition, enhancing international coordination to combat terrorism also remains important.

As the Special Envoy said, the stabilization of the situation in Idlib should be taken as a window of opportunity for reinvigorating the political process, without which there cannot be a sustainable way to address the Syrian crisis. In this regard, since the outcome of the Syrian National Dialogue Congress held in Sochi, we understand the Special Envoy has been conducting a series of extensive consultations with Syrian actors and concerned Member States on the formation of the constitutional committee, which is indeed necessary as the process has to be truly inclusive.

While appreciating the Special Envoy's continued engagement with all stakeholders, we also believe that all actors should fully support his efforts to finalize the establishment process of the committee, which we believe should be credible and Syrian-owned. As is well-known, the constitutional committee is only one element in the Syrian political process, important though it may be. Indeed, the formation of the committee should be a stepping stone for relaunching the Geneva political process in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015).

It is therefore time for all Syrian parties to constructively engage with the Special Envoy to establish the committee as soon as possible. In this regard, we welcome the invitation extended by the Syrian Government to the Special Envoy. As he mentioned, we hope his visit to Syria will be productive and meaningful, leading to concrete outcomes that will move the process forward. We look forward to hearing from him next month. In addition, the Special Envoy's continued consultations with the Astana guarantors and the small-group countries could contribute to speeding up the process of the formation of the committee. The

Council should also demonstrate its unity and continue extending its full support for the tireless efforts of the Special Envoy.

In conclusion, we all agree that there is no military solution to the Syrian crisis. Therefore, finding a comprehensive political solution remains urgent and critical, not only for the sake of the people of Syria, whose legitimate aspirations and concerns should be addressed, but also for regional and international peace and security. The international community, particularly the Security Council, should work together in support of the facilitation role of the Special Envoy for whom we reiterate our appreciation and support.

Mr. Ipo (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): My delegation welcomes today's meeting on the political process in the Syrian Arab Republic and thanks Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, for his informative briefing and for his efforts in the service of peace.

Côte d'Ivoire notes with satisfaction the signing in Sochi on 17 September, under the auspices of the Russian Federation and Turkey, of the agreement providing for a demilitarized zone between the territories under the control of the Syrian armed forces and those held by armed groups. My delegation is pleased that the deadline of 10 October for the withdrawal of all heavy weapons from the zone has been met. Compliance with this agreement by all stakeholders will unquestionably prevent a large-scale offensive that could lead to a new humanitarian tragedy in a country devastated by more than seven years of armed conflict. According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 13.1 million Syrians are in need of humanitarian assistance, 5.6 million Syrian refugees are living outside the country and 6.1 million are internally displaced.

My delegation believes that the effective implementation of the agreement on the demilitarized zone could create the conditions for a resumption of the intra-Syrian dialogue and help to advance the peace process, which is the only way to achieve a peaceful and lasting solution to the crisis in Syria. In this context, Côte d'Ivoire supports the Special Envoy's proposals and welcomed the meetings held at his initiative on 11 and 12 September, with the guarantors of the Astana process, and on 14 September with senior officials from Egypt, France, Germany, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. They represented an opportunity to discuss the establishment of the constitutional committee responsible for drafting the new Constitution of the Syrian Arab Republic and defining the modalities for free and transparent elections, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015), on the road map for the Syrian political process.

Côte d'Ivoire also takes note of the joint statement of Egypt, France, Germany, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, the United Kingdom and the United States of America, the small-group members, made at the margins of the seventy-third session of the General Assembly. The statement, which calls for convening a credible and inclusive constitutional committee as soon as possible, once again demonstrates the international community's interest in the smooth conduct of the Syrian political process. In that context, Côte d'Ivoire invites all Syrian parties to give priority to the dialogue for a negotiated solution to the current impasse. We also reaffirm our commitment to the principle of accountability so that armed persons or groups guilty of serious violations of international humanitarian law and of human rights can be brought before the competent international courts.

In conclusion, Côte d'Ivoire calls for unity in the Security Council with a view to contributing effectively to the settlement of the Syrian crisis, which has gone on for too long.

Mr. Sipaco Ribala (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Republic of Equatorial Guinea welcomes the convening of today's meeting and thanks Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura for his informative briefing. We join the previous delegations in thanking him and expressing our gratitude for the firm commitment and passion he has shown as Special Envoy. We hope that under Mr. De Mistura's leadership a representative and much-desired constitutional committee will be established before he retires as Special Envoy.

We welcome the participation of several member countries of the contact group in today's debate. The Government of my country believes that it is essential for the Security Council and the international community to listen carefully to the actors and countries involved or directly or indirectly affected by these long years of conflict.

On 18 September, Equatorial Guinea, along with several other countries, applauded the signing of the agreement between Russia and Turkey on the establishment of a demilitarized zone in Idlib, which has undoubtedly prevented a large-scale offensive

with catastrophic consequences for Syria and the region, and has given a major boost to the ongoing peace negotiations. We welcome the removal of heavy weapons from the future demilitarized zone in time to meet the deadline agreed in the agreement. However, the most difficult task continues to be convincing the jihadist groups to definitively abandon the area. We call on all parties to the conflict not to weaken the agreement and to accept the conditions agreed in Sochi. In order to do that, they must refrain from armed provocations and take the path towards a peaceful settlement of the situation in the areas under their control.

Equatorial Guinea sees no alternative to the political process in Syria. We will continue to insist on the facilitation of the political process in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015). The demilitarization of Idlib has changed the tone of efforts aimed at settling the conflict, making it more political than military. Indeed, since the signing of the agreement, there have been fewer clashes between the Syrian army and armed opposition groups, and that should enable the political process to move forward.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate the importance of making progress in the search for a political settlement based on negotiations and of establishing an intra-Syrian constitutional committee, under the leadership of the Special Envoy, as soon as possible. However, while we should always respect the sovereignty and independence of the Syrian people, priority should be given to the quality of the composition of the constitutional committee so as to make it impossible for external forces to impose plans that have not been agreed to by the Syrian people or their legitimate representatives, as has been stressed on numerous occasions.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura for his briefing. It is not yet time to bid him farewell, and we will postpone that for now, because he has promised to work on this matter up to the last minute.

Recently in Syria we have seen a trend towards stabilization associated with the liberation of a greater part of the country's territory from the terrorist presence At this stage, Syrians need international support in re-establishing an economy that has been destroyed by the war. The citizens of Syria who are endeavouring to return to their homeland should be getting genuine support from the specialized international agencies. We strongly urge our partners to be guided on these issues by the interests of ordinary Syrians and to refrain from artificially tying them to political progress. Otherwise, as with the unilateral sanctions that end up burdening ordinary citizens, it does not match their publicly trumpeted humanitarian slogans. Judging from what we have heard today, however, our urgings are not likely to find a response from our so-called humanitarians.

Russia, Iran and Turkey are the country guarantors of the Astana process and are continuing their close joint work in the interests of a Syrian settlement. We in this Chamber never tire of asking questions of those who tell us haughtily what we have done wrong and what we should do. But what have those here been doing for a Syrian settlement? We know what they discuss in their so-called small group, and the documents that result from their meetings. They have no relation to the Syrian settlement. They are a collection of ultimatums and conditions. We suggest that the small-country group publish the memorandums that they adopt in their meetings and make them accessible to a broad public. We do not want to do it for them. Then we can discuss with them who is trying to launch a Syrian-owned political process and who is dictating to Syrians what their future should be.

The high-level agreement between Russia and Turkey on temporary measures for stabilizing Idlib governorate has had a palpable effect on the situation that is much appreciated by many of those involved — but not all. It seems that some of our partners are never satisfied. Things before the memorandum were bad, and things after the memorandum are also bad. According to what we have heard today, the memorandum would barely have happened if it hadn't been for the efforts of the so-called small group. I want to let the Council know that the memorandum is being implemented in full, and our Turkish colleagues are working very hard to that end. A number of opposition groups have announced their support for the Sochi memorandum. More than 1,000 militants have left the demilitarized zone. A significant quantity of heavy military equipment has been removed, although there are reports that some groups are trying to hide some of it in the mountains.

The situation is not without difficulties, for which the most radical rebel cells, particularly Jabhat Al-Nusra, are to blame. They are trying to undermine the implementation of the memorandum by shelling towns and villages bordering the de-escalation zone, including the western outskirts of Aleppo. We assume

that extreme measures will be applied to incorrigible terrorists. Those who are ready to break with the radicals are being given a good, indeed a unique chance to return to normal society, and they should make that choice as soon as possible.

All international players must respect Syria's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity. Neither Idlib nor any other part of the country can be seen as some sort of separate entity with special arrangements. Unfortunately, not everyone is complying with those fundamental principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

The United States representative asked about the motives of the Russian presence and activity in Syria. My answer is that Russia is in Syria at the invitation of its legitimate Government. Our aim is to assist Syria in combating international terrorism. We have no other goals or motives. If I may, I will ask him in return what the basis is for the United States presence in Syria and what its motives are. Are they to combat terrorism, or to create quasi-State entities on the territory of a sovereign country and a springboard for some sort of future action in the region?

There are military bases being built and expanded in Syria, including the notorious Al-Tanf, around which a real terrorist breeding ground has formed. The demographic makeup of north-eastern Syria on the left bank of the Euphrates is being violently reconfigured. The fight against the remaining isolated centres of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) is getting nowhere, as if the task of finally defeating the terrorists was not an issue. Now and then the terrorists take over new territories, as is happening in the area of Hajin. From time to time militants are transported somewhere. We do not know what is happening in the areas controlled by the so-called coalition where ISIL members are being held. Are they kept in improvised prisons, prosecuted, returned to their countries of origin? This uncertainty confirms our long-standing suspicions that countering terrorism is only a pretext for maintaining the coalition's military presence in Syria.

As our Syrian colleagues have informed the Security Council, civilians are being killed as a result of the so-called coalition's air strikes on residential areas. We are very concerned about the reports of the use of phosphorous munitions during those bombings, which should be thoroughly investigated. In the territories under the control of the coalition and its local allies, puppet self-governing bodies are being created independently of the authorities in Damascus. What is that if not a blatant violation of Syrian sovereignty through the country's forcible dismemberment? These are neocolonial policies, plain and simple.

We should not omit to mention the ugly story of the fake White Helmet rescuers associated with terrorist organizations. It is they who are some of the main actors in the militants' toxic-substance provocations, which Damascus is then purposely accused of perpetrating. Some of them have been brought out of Syria, but not all of their Western patrons are in a hurry to investigate their clients after analysing their personal affairs. The White Helmets represent a threat to the security of the States of the region, which is why we are asking their patrons to take them away and to hurry up about it. All of them. We wish them luck integrating them into democratic society.

In the meantime, we are pleased to see Damascus and other Middle Eastern capitals finding ways to normalize relations, starting with the most ordinary kind, the human contacts and the trade that have maintained regional ties for thousands of years. The Nasib crossing on Syria's border with Jordan opened just a few days ago. And with the assistance of Russian specialists, work has begun again on the Quneitra crossing after a years-long interruption. There is mutual interest in returning the cross-border interaction between Syria and Iraq to pre-conflict levels. That is a natural process in the interests of the residents of the region, and it would be criminal to interfere with it.

Increased attention is currently focused on forming a constitutional committee on the basis of the Syrian National Dialogue Congress held in Sochi in January. If we are to establish a viable body, which we hope everyone is genuinely interested in, its working parameters require the consent of the Syrian parties. Like other partners, we want to see the committee established as soon as possible, but in this case it will be counterproductive to pursue artificial deadlines, with artificial terms that are artificially introduced. I would like to know why we are not setting deadlines for resolving other crises, such as the Palestinian-Israeli settlement, Yemen or Libya. There, too, let us loudly and fervently demand immediate settlements and set deadlines that do not accord with the interests of the parties or the situations that have evolved. If a process is to be credible, all the parties must agree, and that takes time. So we have to be patient. We simply have to

respect the partners and not demand that they agree to what suits us rather than the parties directly involved in negotiations.

We ask our colleagues from the so-called small group, many of whose participants have not proven themselves in the area of the Syrian settlement, to refrain from unwarranted ultimatums and from putting pressure on the United Nations mediation efforts. While we are open to dialogue, we wonder whether countries that refuse even to talk to the legitimate Syrian Government can play a positive role in supporting the political process.

Mr. De Mistura is well aware that Russia has consistently supported the United Nations efforts for an intra-Syrian settlement and has repeatedly helped it to emerge from what were seemingly hopeless impasses. We have been convinced more than once of his ability to make informed decisions based on his rich diplomatic experience. We hope that his visit to Damascus will be successful. However, we will not stop repeating that for more active progress towards peace in Syria we need to unite the constructive efforts of all the international and regional players with influence and to refrain from confrontation and the execution of geopolitically destructive projects.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I will now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of the Plurinational Republic of Bolivia.

We thank Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Special Envoy of the Secretary General for Syria, for his briefing and we are grateful for his tireless efforts in a difficult job.

We want to emphasize that in the past few months there has been a reduction in military activity in various regions of the Syrian territory, thanks partly to the Syrian Government's consolidation of its control, but also to the efforts of the Astana guarantors, whose agreements must be reinforced if the aim is to reduce violence and facilitate peace and stability in Syria. In that regard, we are pleased with the results of the agreement between the Russian Federation and Turkey on Idlib governorate, which has allowed a demilitarized zone to be established there. We welcome the fact that although the agreement was in force only until 15 October, it is still valid and has been enabling radical combatants to withdraw from Idlib.

We should reiterate, however, that any action in the fight against terrorism must be conducted within the framework of international law and international humanitarian law in particular, so as to guarantee the protection of civilian lives and of workers from the various humanitarian agencies in the field. We reiterate our support for the Special Envoy's work, and for his conversations with the various parties at a so-called high diplomatic level. In that regard, we will be closely watching the results of his visit to Damascus in the next few days, and if necessary the presidency of the Council will convene a meeting to hear a report on his efforts.

We reiterate that there can be no military solution to the conflict in Syria, and we therefore reject any attempt to provoke fragmentation or sectarianism there, as well as the presence there of external forces with no authorization from the Syrian Government. On the contrary, it is clear that the solution requires the continued implementation of the Sochi final declaration, whose main objective is the establishment of a constitutional committee.

Lastly, in accordance with the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations, international law and respect for the principle of the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Syria, we call for the resolution of this conflict through an inclusive, dialogue-based and concerted political process, led by and for the Syrian people, that would make it possible to reach a peaceful, lasting solution to the situation in the framework of the Geneva process and resolution 2254 (2015), and under the auspices of the United Nations.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): The illegal so-called international coalition led by the United States, in another flagrant violation of international law, international humanitarian law and human rights instruments, has committed yet another crime against innocent Syrian civilians. On 13 and 14 October, the coalition's warplanes targeted residential areas in the Syrian city of Hajin, in Deir ez-Zor governorate, using internationally banned white phosphorus bombs and killing a number of civilian martyrs and injuring others, including women and children.

It is now clear to all that this coalition has fought everything but terrorism. Its practices make it clear that

its goals are in harmony with those of terrorist groups. It has sown chaos, death and destruction. The coalition has defied State authority and helped the Da'esh terrorist organization to move its troops to the area east of the Euphrates in order to carry out its acts of aggression in Syria. If it is to preserve its credibility, the Security Council must launch an immediate investigation into these crimes so as to prevent their recurrence, end the illegal presence of United States and other foreign forces in Syria and stop them carrying out their plans to undermine Syria's sovereignty and unity.

Military and political groups have been established without the participation of the Syrian Government. They are suspect because they do not serve the interests of the Syrian people. On the contrary, they defy the Syrian State and support terrorism under political pretexts. The creation of the Brussels group and the small group, or any other entity in which the Syrian Government does not participate, can only be counterproductive and will not help to achieve progress on the political track, which is supposed to be Syrian-led.

Syria is not under anyone's authority. There will not be another Karzai in Damascus. When a meeting was held in Marrakech on 12 December 2012 for the so-called Group of Friends of the Syrian People, at the initiative of France, at the time the Group included 137 members. Today it has only 12. It failed because it was never a friend of the Syrian people. It is as simple as that. That is why the Syrian Government does not recognize any road map that it is not a party to and that it does not approve. The United Nations must not be part of any political group that stands against Syria and the Syrian Government, because those groups are being created outside the authority of the Security Council by political Powers that support terrorism in Syria and in the region.

The countries that have supported the terrorist war against Syria for the past seven years have convened Council meetings for the purpose of grandstanding, and have exploited the United Nations in an unprecedented manner. There have been hundreds of meetings on Syria, formal and informal, Arria Formula and side events — all kinds of meetings. Those meetings have been held every time the Syrian army has been able to defeat the armed terrorist groups, in order to bring political pressure to bear on the Syrian Government and hinder its progress.

Today we are seeing a new chapter in this policy of blackmail. Following the achievements and progress in Astana, and after the Syrian Government's positive engagement with the outcomes of the Sochi Congress, those same countries sought to create an illegal group, known as the small group, outside the authority of the Security Council, with the aim of blocking any progress in Astana or Sochi, turning back the clock and hindering the political process. The Sochi process is the only one that has borne fruit, and the reason is simple: the Syrian Government was part of the process, and that is why it succeeded. Those countries have tried to portray the group as angelically innocent by giving the impression that all of its members are committed to reaching a peaceful settlement of the crisis in Syria.

I wonder how that group, whose members include countries that have financed and supported armed terrorist groups in Syria, can claim to protect Syrians. I will not go into detail about the actions of every State. The Council is well aware of them. I also wonder how this entity, which includes members that have financed, trained and supported terrorists in Syria and committed multiple acts of aggression against it, can claim to be protecting Syrian lives. How can a group whose members include countries that supply terrorist groups with chemical weapons claim to be protecting Syrians? When I spoke about this issue yesterday in a statement before the First Committee (see A/C.1/73/PV.8), I named the country that provided those terrorist groups with chemical weapons. I am referring to Turkey. How can this group, whose members include countries that have issued jihadi fatwas in support of terrorism, claim that it is protecting Syrians? Is the Council aware of the fact that the Al-Nusra Front has refused to implement the Russian-Turkish agreement, which ended three days ago in Idlib? It refused to do that.

Is the Council aware that the leaders of the Al-Nusra Front — and I am not trying to insult Egypt; I respect its Permanent Representative — are mostly Egyptians and Turks, sent by Morsi to Syria to carry out their jihad in Syria?

The religious leaders of the Al-Nusra Front are now at odds with its political leaders. Its religious leaders do not want to implement the Russian-Turkish agreement because they want the bloodshed to continue.

How can a group that has countries among its members that occupy parts of our territory claim that they are going to protect Syrian lives? There are

American, British, French and Turkish forces on Syrian territory. How can the small group, which calls itself an international coalition, assist us while it occupies parts of our land? How can a group whose members have Syrian blood on their hands claim to protect Syrian lives?

Instead of preaching to the Council, we ask it for answers. We need clear answers and a specific position taken by the Security Council against the presence of illegal foreign forces on our land. We need it to take a position against terrorism and against sponsoring and financing terrorism. We need a position that respects the Syrian Government, instead of one that creates vacuum by pushing for a failed State, thereby helping to spread terrorism across the region.

I find it necessary to remind some members of Chapter I, Article 2, paragraph 7 of the Charter of the United Nations, which states that "Nothing contained in the present Charter shall authorize the United Nations to intervene in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any State...". Perhaps this Article belongs to the charter of the planet Mars rather than the United Nations, because some members seem to have forgotten about it.

The Syrian Government has emphasized its readiness to positively respond to all initiatives that would help the Syrians end the crisis, as long as they respect national principles, including the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity and unity of Syria and its people; give the Syrian people the exclusive right to determine the future of their country without any foreign interference; and reject the presence of terrorism on Syrian territories. All of these beautiful words appear in Council resolutions on Syria. I did not make them up. That is what Security Council resolutions state. They have also been mentioned in statements made today in this Chamber.

The Syrian Government engaged positively and with openness in the Geneva discussions, the Astana process and in the Syrian National Dialogue Congress, held in Sochi. However, the other parties stalled. They rejected dialogue, invested in terrorism and foreign interference and sought to undermine Syrian sovereignty and resilience. Today, we listened to the Permanent Representative of the Netherlands as he outlined a number of conditions. He said that it is too early to talk about reconstruction, too early for the return of internally displaced persons and refugees, too early to lift the unilateral and coercive economic measures, too early to address the humanitarian situation in certain parts of Syria and therefore too early to end terrorism. Despite everything, the Syrian Government continues to positively engage in implementing the outcomes of the Syrian National Dialogue Congress held in Sochi on the formation of a constitutional committee to review the current Constitution. We do not want a constitutional vacuum because Syria is not a failed State.

The Syrian Government presented a practical and comprehensive vision on the composition, prerogatives and working methods of the committee and submitted to the Special Envoy a list of representatives supported by the Syrian State. We underscore in that regard that the mandate of the Committee is limited to reviewing the articles of the current Constitution through a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned process. We stress that the Special Envoy must respect his mandate as a facilitator of the committee. No preconditions should be imposed on it nor should its recommendations be prejudged. The Committee must be independent since the Constitution and all relevant matters are Syrian issues to be decided upon by Syrians themselves. We will therefore not accept any proposal that interferes in the internal affairs of Syria or that leads to that end. We stand ready to work actively with friendly countries to launch the committee along the parameters I have just mentioned.

My country welcomed the agreement reached in Sochi on 17 September with regard to the city of Idlib because we are committed to stopping the bloodshed. The agreement came as a result of intensive consultations between Syria and Russia and with full coordination between the two countries. We hope that it will bear fruit and that the Turkish regime will uphold its side of the deal. We stress that the agreement is time-bound and includes clear deadlines. It complements all previous agreements on the de-escalation zones that resulted from the Astana process. Just like any region in Syria, the city of Idlib will return to the fold of Syrian State sovereignty. In order to achieve sustainable and durable peace in Syria, all illegal foreign forces, including Turkish, American, British, French and Israeli forces, must leave the Syrian territories. We consider all of them to be occupying forces. Their presence on Syrian land runs counter to the Charter, international law and relevant Council resolutions on Syria.

The Syrian Government has never interfered in the internal affairs of any Member State. It has always sought to respect and uphold the principles of

the Charter and of international law. On behalf of my country, I stress today that we will block any attempts of provocation and escalation that undermine our relations with the Arab region and the world. As a result, we have sought to re-open the Nasib border crossing with Jordan. We will also open other border crossings, with Iraq, very soon.

The progress made by Syria and its allies in the war against terrorism has led to new developments in Syria and the region, which must be taken into account in any discussion on my country. It is time for those parties and Powers that support terrorism to review and reconsider their positions and join an international effort to stop supporting this heinous terrorist war. Supporting terrorism is a threat to international peace and security in the long and short run. It is time for all those detached from reality to wake up, let go of their fantasies and come to their senses. They must realize that they will not achieve politically what they failed to achieve through terrorism.

In conclusion, my country continues to seek a political solution that would allow Syrians themselves to make decisions about their future without foreign interference, in a manner that ensures Syria's sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity. Based on our respect for the role of the United Nations in facilitating Syrian dialogue, my country has invited the Special Envoy to Syria in the coming days to hold discussions on issues related to his mandate.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Jordan.

Ms. Bahous (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, allow me to thank you, Mr. President, for organizing this meeting and for your efforts throughout your presidency to reinforce the principles on which the United Nations was founded. I also wish to express my thanks and appreciation to Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, for his comprehensive briefing. In that regard, I would like to pay tribute to the relentless efforts he has made and continues to make to achieve a political solution to the crisis in Syria.

All previous approaches to dealing with the Syrian crisis have failed. That is why we need to redouble our honest efforts and put the interests of Syria and its people above all other considerations. Today, this requires the Security Council to step up its work to reach a political solution to this crisis. That solution must be able to preserve the unity and integrity of Syria and be accepted by all Syrians.

Since the beginning of the crisis in Syria, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan has worked with the international community to find a peaceful solution that would avoid the destruction of Syria and the displacement of its people. We have also helped to contain the human impact and alleviate the suffering of the brotherly Syrian people, as was clearly reflected in our contribution to the development and adoption of resolutions 2139 (2014) and 2165 (2014), on the humanitarian situation in Syria.

Jordan will continue to support all multilateral efforts to assist Syria in reaching a political solution. That is why we hope to return to the Geneva process and the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015) so as to preserve the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria and create an environment conducive to restoring stability, which will reflect positively on the political settlement and contribute to the return of displaced persons and refugees. In this context, the reopening of the Jaber-Nasib crossing point on the borders between Jordan and Syria is a step that we hope will help achieve stability and pave the way for the voluntary return of refugees to their homes.

In the context of our commitment to the return of stability in Syria, my country reaffirms its full support for the efforts deployed by Mr. De Mistura and the United Nations to reach a solution to this crisis through the formation of a Syrian constitutional committee as soon as possible, thereby launching a political process that would include all Syrian parties and components under the auspices of the United Nations.

My country currently hosts 1.3 million of our Syrian brothers. We have exceeded our absorptive capacity and are doing all we can to support and assist those refugees, despite the enormous pressures of their presence on the national economy. The costs of hosting Syrian refugees, as well as the direct costs of the Syrian crisis to the Kingdom, have now exceeded $10 billion. This amount includes the costs of education, health care and subsidies for electricity, water, sanitation and the use of infrastructure, as well as security and other costs.

We underscore once again that the refugee crisis is a global responsibility. Everyone agrees on that, and it therefore requires an international solution. However, international assistance is not currently covering real

needs. There must be coordinated efforts to ensure the flow of humanitarian assistance within Syria and to support host countries and communities, including Jordan, as we encourage the voluntary return of Syrian refugees to their homes as an inevitable outcome. We reaffirm the importance of coordinating efforts to achieve this end through the creation of an atmosphere conducive to the voluntary return of those refugees.

I am confident that the Security Council appreciates the great responsibility and heavy burden it bears in the service of Syria's citizens, who place their hopes in the Council so that their spirits may be reassured and the situation stabilized in order for normal life to be resumed. The international community therefore needs to make further efforts to meet the interests and aspirations of the brotherly Syrian people.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Egypt.

Mr. Edrees (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like at the outset to thank you, Mr. President, for giving us the opportunity today to address the Council and to clarify the Egyptian position at this important stage in the Syrian crisis. I would also like to express our appreciation to Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura and thank him for his comprehensive briefing.

Since the early days of the crisis, Egypt has reiterated what everyone has said today — that there is no military solution to this crisis and a settlement in Syria will be achieved only through a political solution that would uphold Syria's sovereignty over its territories within one country for all Syrians. Such a solution would at the same time meet the aspirations of the Syrian people in all its different factions and components and allow them to live in prosperity, freedom and democracy.

Egypt has not reaffirmed this position simply by making statements and slogans; rather we have translated our words into action at every level. In recent years, we have communicated with all Syrian parties in order to facilitate a settlement. We have exerted great efforts to support the voices of the national opposition and to make them heard and heeded in order to counterbalance the voices of extremism that enjoy the funding and support of many other parties. This has given Syrians the opportunity to establish the Cairo platform, which has become a main foundation for the Syrian national opposition.

Egypt has also sponsored many truce agreements in Syria. Moreover, it has positively used its non-permanent membership of the Security Council to contribute to guaranteeing continued humanitarian access to Syrians throughout the country, including Idlib, over two full years. We made strenuous efforts to prevent humanitarian support from being affected by the polarization witnessed in the Security Council during that time. Those efforts were crowned by the adoption of resolution 2393 (2017) concerning cross-border assistance, based on a draft resolution that we penned in cooperation with Sweden and Japan.

Furthermore, since the beginning of the crisis, Egypt has consistently affirmed the need to eradicate terrorism and extremism in Syria. We have warned of the dangers of being lenient with terrorist organizations or politicizing the positions of countries in this regard. We have warned of the dangers of ignoring or turning a blind eye to parties that have transformed parts of Syria into fertile ground for terrorism and extremism. Certain parts of Syria would not have become safe havens for terrorist groups had it not been for the questionable failure of the international community to uphold its duty in this regard, a failure that requires further explanation.

I am compelled to reiterate the same call that we have issued time and time again to all countries, especially the major Powers, to set aside their differences and search for an adequate format, to be coordinated among them, in order to eliminate the presence of terrorist organizations inside Syria. Whether it be the Al-Nusra Front or others, and regardless of their nationalities, those terrorist organizations — in Idlib or elsewhere — must be stopped from spreading beyond Syria to other countries of the region, including Libya, with which we share a border of over 1,000 kilometres. We are not here to simply substitute one safe haven for terrorists with another in a region that has been blighted by disputes and conflicts, external interference and terrorist organizations and militias.

Today, we reaffirm and underscore that the brotherly people of Syria will be able to heal from the damage and the wounds suffered by their country over the past several years only through a comprehensive and inclusive political solution, provided that it is based on international consensus embodied in resolution 2254 (2015) and the United Nations-led Geneva process.

Unfortunately, 10 months have passed since the latest round of negotiations was held within the framework of the Geneva process. That is unacceptable. The lack of progress in the negotiations will simply exacerbate the crisis and hold it hostage to the situation on the ground, which will lead to the further deterioration of the situation and an increase in the number of victims of the Syrian crisis. We must not remain silent in that regard. I reaffirm our rejection of allowing the political process to be held hostage to developments on the ground or of simply succumbing to the delusion of a military solution.

In that context, I reaffirm the content of the statement issued on 27 September at the recent ministerial meeting of the Small Group in New York, on the margins of the General Assembly meetings. The statement called for support for a political solution and the convening of a constitutional committee to that end as soon as possible. I would like to remind the Council that work on the constitutional committee is aimed primarily at facilitating political negotiations by moving forward the activation of one of the four negotiating baskets. Unfortunately, we are witnessing further delays on the political track, which threaten to create additional complications in the crisis and to increase the suffering of our brother people of Syria.

Let me underscore the need for Special Envoy De Mistura to exercise his authority and call for the convening of the first meeting of the constitutional committee without delay, as he indicated earlier that he would, while keeping in mind that the lists for the committee have been drawn up. We also hope that the Special Envoy will brief the Security Council and keep it updated on the progress made, especially following his visit to Damascus.

In conclusion, I underline that Egypt will remain committed to supporting the brotherly people of Syria. Egypt stands ready to provide all forms of support to our Syrian brothers in the next phase of the process, including by providing them with constitutional expertise that could be useful in the coming days. We also express our readiness to work constructively to bring together the various views among Syrian national factions so as to firmly establish the country's sovereignty and ensure the integrity of Syrian territories and the safety of the Syrian people.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Al-Mouallimi (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your wise leadership of the Security Council for this month, and to wish you continued success. I also thank the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, for his valuable briefing and for all his tireless efforts over the past four years to find a way out of this crisis. I regret that he has been unable to arrive at a political settlement, due to the obstinacy of the Syrian regime. I hope that Mr. De Mistura will find what he and the international community are seeking during the remaining period of his mission.

My country supports all international and regional efforts to end the current crisis in Syria. We believe that the solution to the Syrian crisis will not be achieved through military operations or chemical weapons, which have wrought the worst forms of destruction upon the Syrian country and people The only solution to the Syrian crisis is political, based on resolution 2254 (2015). My country believes that through its obstinate, procrastinating and belittling attitude, the Syrian regime has obstructed the efforts of international actors to achieve progress through meaningful negotiations. It has hindered the Geneva negotiations, the previous eight rounds of which failed to achieve any tangible progress with regard to restoring Syria to its former status.

My country is part of the small group on Syria, which was established to support the efforts of Special Envoy De Mistura to find a political solution to the crisis. In that regard, we stress the need to step up the establishment of the constitutional committee so that it can begin drafting a new Syrian constitution, and we call on all Syrians inside the country and abroad to elect a Government under the supervision of the United Nations in a credible and inclusive manner. My country reiterates the small group's call for the constitutional committee to begin its work as soon as possible, within the next several weeks. We call on the Syrian regime and all other parties to prioritize the interests of the Syrian people and refrain from hindering in any way the Special Envoy's efforts to form the constitutional committee so that Syria can be saved from its catastrophic crisis.

This is the eighth year of the Syrian crisis, and my country is deeply concerned about the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the country. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia urges the international community to address that reality with greater responsibility. Since

the beginning of the crisis, the Kingdom has been intensely focused on the human dimension of the crisis and provided every form of support to the Syrian people. For example, my country is hosting more than 2 million Syrians and providing them with employment opportunities, health care and education. It has also provided those who wish to do so with the possibility of moving to other locations. Currently, more than 140,000 male and female Syrian students are attending Saudi universities and schools and being provided with the same benefits as Saudi students.

My country has sought diligently to consolidate the Syrian opposition under the auspices of both Riyadh conferences so that the opposition and the regime can negotiate to ensure the security, stability and unity of Syria and prevent destructive foreign intervention. Moreover, my country has worked with its sister States of the United Arab Emirates, the Kingdom of Bahrain, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and the Arabic Republic of Egypt. We are working together to consolidate an Arab role in finding a solution to the Syrian crisis and provide support for the Syrian people by all possible and available means.

My country rejects any interference in Syria by the Iranian regime, regardless of the form it takes. We reject Iran's support for the Syrian authorities in operations that have led to uprooting people from their homes and demographic change, as well as for the genocide and sectarian mass murder that are being carried out against the Syrian people. We must end those destructive actions, the serious consequences of which have destroyed infrastructure and led to the killing and displacement of many Syrians. The Government of my country believes that the only effective action that Iran can take in the Syrian crisis is to leave Syria and withdraw its Revolutionary Guard and security militias immediately, thereby leaving Syria for the Syrians.

In conclusion, the world must realize that the time has come to change the tragic reality in Syria. The international community must work seriously and with resolve to advance the political process. That would enable us to save what can be saved and pull Syria from the rubble under which it is buried. The cause of that distress is the arrogant and immoral behaviour exhibited by that pathetic regime under the guise of combating terrorism. The regime intentionally ignores the fact that it created a breeding ground for terrorism to spread throughout the country and allowed the greatest sponsor of terrorism, Iran, to enter Syrian territory.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Al Habib (Iran): I would like to begin by wholeheartedly thanking the Bolivian presidency for convening this meeting. No one can forget Bolivia's principled and rational position or its dedication and tireless efforts during its presidency of the Council, which will remain forever in Council history. I also thank Mr. Staffan de Mistura for his efforts and briefing.

The implementation of the agreement to create a demilitarized zone in Idlib continues, in particular thanks to the cooperation of the Syrian Government. To review that process, a ministerial meeting of the Astana guarantor States was convened here in New York on 26 September. It was underscored that every effort should be made for the full implementation of the agreement, and it was emphasized in particular that in order to preserve the Idlib de-escalation zone and to build on that achievement, all terrorists must leave the zone. The guarantor States also reiterated their strong resolve to continue fighting terrorists.

With respect to terrorists, one thing should be made crystal clear: foreign terrorist fighters should return to their country of origin, and terrorists of Syrian origin must be dealt with according to Syrian law. In any case, and as a principle in combating terrorists inside or outside of Syria, international humanitarian and human rights law should be strictly observed. Regarding the armed opposition groups, it is essential that all States with an influence thereon encourage them to end the fighting in order to join the political process. That is crucial to making any progress in the political domain.

Concerning the political process, our ministers expressed satisfaction at the fact that there is increasingly strong international support for the efforts initiated within the Astana process, aimed at solving the Syrian crisis through political means. That is also confirmation of the fact that the Syrian crisis did not and does not have any military solution. We appreciate the efforts of Mr. De Mistura with respect to the establishment of a constitutional committee. At the same time, we would like to stress that measures related to the constitutional committee should be carried out according to the understandings reached between the Astana guarantor States and the Special Envoy. The proposal that was submitted in that regard should be further examined and adjusted. In their upcoming

consultations in Geneva, the representatives of the Astana guarantor States will discuss that issue with the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General.

We underline the importance of making progress in launching the constitutional committee. Nevertheless, exerting political pressure to set artificial deadlines, deviating from the understandings reached or any other political manoeuvring is not acceptable and would prove to be counterproductive. No success can be achieved and no progress can be made through making hasty decisions, ignoring the realities on the ground or making political miscalculations. Ultimately, the right to determine the future of Syria belongs exclusively to Syrians. We should therefore only facilitate a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process.

One of the key factors that can contribute to national dialogue and accelerate the reconciliation process is the return of all refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), and every effort should therefore be made to facilitate their voluntary return. Unfortunately, there have been attempts to deliberately discourage refugees and IDPs from returning to their homes. That is an irresponsible approach. They should not be forced to stay where they are or prevented from repatriating.

Equally important is the reconstruction of Syria. This is critical to facilitating the return of refugees and IDPs and to launching a significant political process. While the Syrian Government has already started the reconstruction process, the international community needs to contribute to the country in order to enable it to rebuild all of its infrastructure. That should not be politicized, delayed or made conditional. Just as the Islamic Republic of Iran supported Syria in defeating terrorists, it will also play a constructive role in bringing peace and prosperity to the country.

Finally, with regard to the allegations made by the United States, I must stress that they only reflect the failure of that country's policies in Syria. Rather than making such claims, the United States must end its occupation of Syrian territory and stop supporting terrorist groups.

I always hesitate to respond to our colleagues from Saudi Arabia, but, unfortunately, they misuse every meeting here in the Security Council and in the General Assembly as an opportunity to go against Iran and encourage a few small States of the region to follow them. That is very sad for our region. That country has played a very destructive role. Everyone around this table knows about Saudi Arabia's destructive role in the region, which recent events have demonstrated. It should cease its fabrications and disinformation. Terrorist groups in Syria and Iraq were nurtured by Saudi ideologies, funded by its petrodollars and armed with its weapons. Saudi Arabia should stop talking about Syria or Iran's legitimate presence in the country, which is only to fight the terrorists backed by the United States and Saudi Arabia.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mr. Sinirlioğlu (Turkey): I would like to thank Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura for his comprehensive briefing. He identified the main challenges that lie ahead on the political track. As his mission comes to an end, I would like also to express our deep appreciation to him for his tireless efforts in finding a political solution to the Syrian crisis. Before sharing our views on the way forward, I would like to provide an update on the implementation of the Idlib memorandum. The memorandum signed one month ago at the Sochi Turkish-Russian summit a month ago stabilized the situation in Idlib province. Thanks to the memorandum, it was possible to preserve the de-escalation status of Idlib.

Since my most recent statement to the Council on the situation in Syria (see S/PV.8355), considerable progress has been made in the implementation of the memorandum on the following points: the cessation of hostilities has been established; the borders of the demilitarized zone in Idlib have been determined; the withdrawal of heavy weapons from the demilitarized zone has been completed ahead of the 10 October deadline; significant progress has been achieved on the withdrawal of radical groups from the demilitarized zone — we are continuing our efforts to that end — and we are working on the modalities of coordinated patrols together with Russia as well as on other measures aimed at strengthening the sustainability of the ceasefire regime.

Thanks to the memorandum, further bloodshed and a humanitarian tragedy in Idlib have been averted. Relieved over the improvement of the situation on the ground, tens of thousands of Syrians have started to return to their homes in Idlib. Following months of fear in anticipation of a full-scale assault, the memorandum has given civilians in Idlib respite and raised their hopes for a peaceful solution. The memorandum has

also proven that the situation in Idlib can be addressed through effective diplomacy.

The de-escalation status of Idlib remains crucial to prevent a humanitarian catastrophe, to pave the way for the advancement of the political process, and to create the necessary conditions to fight terrorism effectively and in line with international humanitarian law. Our priority now is to seize on this momentum to advance the political process. With that understanding, we strongly and actively support Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura's efforts to establish the constitutional committee as soon as possible. We are working closely with the other Astana guarantors and Mr. De Mistura towards that end.

The constitutional committee requires a credible, inclusive and balanced structure. That is essential to its legitimacy. The committee will be the key to achieving the ultimate goal of finding a negotiated political solution in Syria, in line with resolution 2254 (2015). Its work will pave the way for holding free and fair elections under United Nations supervision, with the participation of all Syrians, including those who are living outside the country. Any attempt to design a political system for Syria without Syrian ownership would lack legitimacy and be detrimental. The political process must be owned and led by the Syrians themselves, and not by others deciding on their behalf.

We reiterate our call on the Council and the overall international community to support our endeavours and expedite the political process. In order to give fresh impetus to the efforts to put an end to the conflict, Turkey has introduced the idea of hosting a quadrilateral summit with the participation of France, Germany and Russia. Our main objective is to contribute to efforts to find a convergence of ideas to reach a sustainable political solution. Talks among the four countries to set the date and agenda of the summit are under way. We believe that this initiative will be helpful in supporting the efforts to reach a political settlement.

The conflict in Syria is in its eighth year, at the cost of hundreds of thousands of lives lost and millions forcibly displaced both within and beyond Syria's borders. There is an urgent need for concerted efforts to end this colossal human tragedy, meet the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people and pave the way for lasting peace. Turkey will continue its efforts to achieve a viable political solution in Syria, a solution that is owned and led by Syrians and based on a lasting ceasefire on the ground that allows for a meaningful political process. It is high time that the Security Council puts its weight behind efforts to that end.

Lastly, I do not consider the regime's representative my legitimate counterpart. I will therefore not dignify his delusional accusations with a response.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Germany.

Mr. Schulz (Germany): I would like to thank the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria for his comprehensive briefing. It is certainly much too early to bid him farewell, but let me take this opportunity to express our deep gratitude for his tireless peace efforts over all these years. It is with great regret that we note the fact that his mission will soon come to an end.

Like Jordan, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, Germany is taking the floor as a member of the Small Group on Syria. I will make three brief points on the situation in Idlib, the political process and refugees.

To start with Idlib, we welcome the fact that the Idlib agreement reached by Turkey and Russia has so far prevented a full-scale military offensive by the Syrian regime that could have triggered an unprecedented humanitarian catastrophe. At the same time, we call on Russia and Iran, as Astana guarantors alongside Turkey, to ensure that the ceasefire continues to be fully respected by all parties, including the Syrian regime. We expect them to follow through with their commitment and guarantee the protection of civilians and infrastructure, as well as safe, unhindered and sustained humanitarian access.

On the political process, as Secretary-General Guterres emphasized, with the Idlib agreement now in place the international community must seize the opportunity to move forward with the United Nations-led political process. Otherwise, the military de-escalation will not be sustainable. We need to urgently seize the chance to make progress in the United Nations-led political process. Now is the time to start working towards an inclusive, credible and sustainable political solution in Syria, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015).

Germany therefore fully supports the Special Envoy's efforts and his clear mandate to convene a constitutional committee as quickly as possible, as the members of the small group called for in their statement of 27 September. The Special Envoy's clear mandate to

form a credible and inclusive constitutional committee must be respected. In that regard, Russia and the Syrian regime must live up to their Sochi commitments. That includes respecting the fact that it is solely the Special Envoy's prerogative to select the independent members of the committee. We urge all parties to refrain from any attempts to manipulate or undermine that process. Doing so would endanger its credibility and legitimacy and therefore any prospect of achieving a political solution consistent with resolution 2254 (2015). We are looking forward to Staffan de Mistura's next report on the progress achieved in the Security Council.

Finally, I want to say a word on refugees and reconstruction. We repeatedly hear suggestions these days from Russia, Iran and the Syrian regime that it is time for the return of refugees and for reconstruction. Let me say first that Germany has made very significant contributions to alleviating the suffering of the Syrian people by contributing to the financing of humanitarian assistance, and we will continue to do so.

With respect to returns, Germany, too, certainly supports the return of Syrian refugees to their homes, but only if and once the conditions are ripe. More than stones, cement and bulldozers, Syrian refugees need safety guarantees and political change in Syria so that they can begin to see a future for themselves in the country they had to flee. Returns must be voluntary, safe and dignified, in accordance with international standards. As the key institution for dealing with refugees, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) must not be bypassed. It stands ready to facilitate large-scale returns once the many obstacles have been removed and the necessary guarantees are in place. We fully agree with UNHCR that the biggest immediate obstacle for a large-scale return is the lack of safety in Syria. Returnees need more than protection from armed conflict; they need to be safe from political persecution, arbitrary arrests or expropriation.

Certainly, Syria needs economic and social rebuilding, but as we and the European Union have stressed many times, we will have a meaningful discussion on reconstruction only if we see clear, irrevocable progress in the political process. We will not invest in war and corruption. We will not build on shifting sands. What we need is a political transition that paves the way for viable economic and social reconstruction.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic, who has asked to make an additional statement.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syria) (*spoke in Arabic*): I apologize for requesting the floor once again, but I will be brief.

In my statement, I pointed out the political flaws of the small group on Syria and its construction. However, I would like now to draw attention to its moral flaw, namely, the presence therein of the Saudi regime, which is underdeveloped in terms of civilization and mentality. In that regard, I would like to shed light on some points that were raised in the statement of the Saudi Ambassador.

First, in his statement he called for drafting a new constitution for my country. There is an Arab saying that if you are riddled with flaws, you must hide them. Members know that Saudi Arabia has no constitution and no Parliament. The country does not even have a name. Instead, its name belongs to the ruling family. Thus when someone says "the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia", it is as if that person were saying "the Republic of Macron" for France, or "the Kingdom of Theresa May" for Britain, or the "United States of Trump". That is the case now. That country has no name.

Secondly, a regime that kidnaps and holds the Prime Minister of another State and imprisons its own princes and businessmen until they pay ransom is unworthy of respect. It is a regime that is concealing one of its opponents, who was basically a member of Saudi intelligence and worked in Washington, D.C., for many years, and was a right-hand man of the current Saudi Minister for Foreign Affairs. It is a regime that kidnaps a Saudi opponent, Mr. Khashoggi — although I am sure those present have not heard his name before — and holds him in his country's consulate in Istanbul. No one knows what has become of him. That is a regime that cannot speak of law and the pain of others because it is surrounded by the stench of such actions.

Thirdly, the Saudi Ambassador spoke of the desire of his country's regime to help the Syrian people, ignoring the fact that the Saudi regime is primarily responsible for spreading takfiri and Wahhabi terrorism in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, Libya, Nigeria and South-East Asia.

Fourthly, a regime that sheds blood in Yemen, creates alliances with Israel to bury the Palestinian question and pays generously to buy the conscience of

those who defend it is not worthy of being allowed to speak in the Council about humanitarian and political issues pertaining to other countries. The list goes on, but I will stop at this point.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Saudi Arabia, who has asked to make an additional statement.

Mr. Al-Mouallimi (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): When truth appears, liars flee. I did not want to take more of the Council's precious time to respond to the nonsense of my colleague the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic, first, because I personally sympathize with him and secondly, because I sympathize with our brother people of Syria, who are suffering at the hands of their leaders and politicians. However, the Syrian regime and those who represent it are the last people who should speak of morality and accusations the way Syria's representative did. He brings up the disappearance of one journalist but seems to ignore the thousands of journalists who have vanished into Syrian prisons, or the people who have been forcibly disappeared and killed, who number not just in the thousands but in the tens of thousands.

He speaks of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia as being responsible for the problems of the entire world. The only thing he has not yet blamed it for is the tsunami that recently hit Indonesia. We know quite well that his regime is the one that opened the doors to enable terrorism in Syria to threaten the entire region. That regime has no moral right to speak as it just has, because its record is riddled with flaws, both hidden and visible, as we have seen everywhere and in every forum.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): I want to take the floor again to make the following point. It is good that under rule 37 we can hear from Members of the United Nations that are not currently serving on the Security Council. But I really do think that delegations that speak under rule 37 should speak to the agenda item at hand. The agenda item today has been Syria. The situation in Syria is dire enough. I do not think it right that some representatives on this side who spoke under rule 37 used it to pursue personal and national agendas against other Members of the United Nations.

The situation is bad enough in Syria that it deserves our whole attention. We ought to be working as a Council, supported by the wider membership, to support the Secretary-General and his Special Envoy. We do not need lectures from two countries that have done more than anyone else to contribute to the dire situation inside Syria. I therefore hope that when Member States ask to speak under rule 37 in future — and we want to invite them to do so for all the reasons of transparency and openness that we all subscribe to — they will stick to the agenda at hand.

Mr. Cohen (United States of America): I would like to fully associate myself with the statement that the representative of the United Kingdom just made and to add that, in particular, coming from a regime whose behaviour and use of chemical weapons has driven millions of its own citizens to flee as refugees, that statement was outrageous, whether made here in the Council or indeed anywhere.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I did not plan to take the floor either, but my colleagues have left me with no choice. Yes, of course rule 37 is an important one, and we are obliged to keep to the designated agenda item for the meeting that we are discussing, but insisting that the representative of a country that is directly affected by the agenda item we discussing today does not have the right to give his view of the situation, and of its genesis and current and future state as his country sees it, shows a lack of respect for that country's legitimate representative. I want to point that out to the Council once again. And yet it is no secret. We know perfectly well that the countries that have just made statements lack any respect for the legitimate representatives of the Syrian Government — more than that, their attitude to them is totally disrespectful.

Let us grant the countries that we invite here under rule 37 the right to say what they consider to be essential on the agenda item that we are discussing today. Incidentally, I saw no deviation from the issues we are discussing today in the statements by the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic. Perhaps the countries that just took the floor did not like something he said, but this is one of those cases where responding with "the truth hurts" is the adage that applies.

I would suggest to the countries that spoke with such impassioned support for abiding by the rules of procedure and our meeting's agenda that they listen very carefully to the words that we heard today not only from the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic but from many other delegations. They show that our versions of what has happened, what is happening and what may happen in Syria are divergent, to put it mildly. In our

statement we called on countries, including those that have opposed us today, to put aside their differences and work together so that we can, finally, arrive at a political settlement in Syria, which is what we all so desperately want.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I shall now make a short statement — I am sure it will be the last — on the way in which Bolivia is presiding over the Security Council.

We agree that States must keep their remarks within the framework of the agenda for which a meeting is convened. Unfortunately, in many cases, that is not happening, and I could cite several examples. When we talk about the question of Palestine, some States talk about other matters. However, for this presidency, all Member States are on the same footing. This presidency will never cut off any State while it is speaking because we believe that the State knows what it is talking about and has every right to express itself with the utmost freedom in the Security Council. As long as we are presiding over the Security Council, therefore, that is how we will conduct ourselves.

The meeting rose at 12:30 p.m.

United Nations S/PV.8374

Security Council

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Official communiqué of the 8374th (closed) meeting of the Security Council

Held in private at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday 17 October 2018, at 3 p.m.

In accordance with rule 55 of the provisional rules of procedure of the Security Council, the following communiqué was issued through the Secretary-General in place of a verbatim record:

"On 17 October 2018, the Security Council, pursuant to annex II, sections A and B of resolution 1353 (2001), held its 8374th meeting in private with the troop- and police-contributing countries to the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic.

"The President invited Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, to participate in the meeting in accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

"The Security Council and the troop- and police-contributing countries heard a briefing by Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix.

"Members of the Council, Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix and representatives of participating contributing countries had an exchange of views."

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